

## *Chapter 9: Delilah Shows What Makes Strong Men Weak*

**D**ELILAH, who had been dining with some friends at the Cloven Hoof Inn, was hurrying home when a man stopped her.

“My dear,” he said, “I would like to make you——”

“Be your age!” Delilah snapped. “I’ve given up that sort of thing long ago. And besides, I have an engagement.”

“You misunderstand me,” the gentleman replied in a shocked voice. “I desire to make you a proposition.”

“Really?” Delilah began to laugh. “I hope for the sake of my past reputation that your intentions are strictly dishonorable.”

The gentleman, who was tall, and dark, and somewhat elderly, frowned.

“You refer, I presume, to your reputation as

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the worst woman among the Philistines?" he muttered.

"Well, I like that! Everybody in Gaza agreed that I was the best in my profession. I was a manicure, you know. But why am I being given the third degree?"

"I will explain. My name is Anthony—but perhaps, since I am not a resident of Hades, and am only here on a visit, I had better not go into details. All you need know is that while on Earth I was a famous censor of public morals."

"Then what are you doing down here. There aren't any morals in Hell, either public or private."

"That's just the point. There ought to be. As soon as I learned of the deplorable conditions existing here among the damned I decided that it was my duty to investigate and make a report to the Throne."

"Well—I'm not stopping you. And I don't see why you are stopping me."

"I will tell you. There is a club here, I understand, composed of twelve notorious women, of which you are one. The better element of Hades consider your organization, with

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its frank discussion of sex matters, a menace to public decency and want it suppressed. They have asked me to investigate, by attending one of your meetings."

"Men aren't allowed," said Delilah shortly. "Satan's orders."

"I know. But why couldn't you admit me secretly—place me in an adjoining room, perhaps, where I might see and hear everything without myself being observed? If I find nothing to criticize, well and good. If I am obliged to make an adverse report, I promise to keep your name out of it. In either case, I shall experience an agreeable thrill——"

"You old reprobate!" Delilah exclaimed. "Do you suppose I would treat my friends like that? If you try any snooping around *my* house I'll set the dogs on you. On your way!" She flounced off down the street.

When the members of the club, who were waiting for her, heard the story they went into gales of laughter.

"Imagine anyone being sufficiently optimistic to try to reform Hell," Thais laughed. "We ought to tell Satan about it."

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"Better not, my dear," Eve observed. "The Old Boy isn't a bit favorable toward our club, you know. This Anthony person might win him over. If he is the one I think he is, he had the authorities under his thumb while he was on Earth. We had best say nothing about it. Delilah darling, I hope you haven't forgotten that you were to tell us about the unfortunate collapse of your boy friend Samson."

"What makes strong men weak," Salome murmured.

"I ought to know something on that subject," said Delilah, taking off her filagree wrap.

"Most women do, I think," Phryne remarked, observing her perfect outline in a mirror. "You told me the other day, I believe, that you began life as a manicure. Why did you pick out that particular profession?"

"I don't know of any way," laughed Delilah, "in which a girl can keep in closer touch with her customers."

"Did you use the touch system on Samson?" Thais asked.

"Of course. Right from the start. I was sitting at my table in Gaza's biggest and best

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barber shop one day, wondering what I was going to do that evening, when a tall, ugly-looking kike came in.

“He needed a haircut if anybody ever did, but when he sat down in the boss’s chair all he asked for was a shave.

“I’d heard a lot about Samson, of course, ever since he won the heavyweight championship of the East, but I’d never seen him, and wouldn’t have known him then but for the boss.

“‘Hello, Mr. Samson,’ he said, shaking the champ’s hand. ‘What are you doing in Gaza? And how is the box-fighting business these days?’

“As soon as I heard that I began to take notice. ‘Delilah old girl,’ I said to myself, ‘here is a large party you might just as well crash.’ So when the boss had got through shaving the big fellow, and he was on his way out, I stepped up to him and spoke my piece.

“‘Why not have a nice little manicure,’ I said, ‘to make your day complete?’

“‘Meaning you?’ the champ asked, giving me the once over.

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“‘Who else?’ I countered. ‘I’m the only one in the place.’

“‘All right, cutie,’ he laughed, sitting down at my table. ‘No reason I shouldn’t take you on for a couple of rounds, just to let you have the pleasure of holding a real he-man’s hand. How’s that for a left?’ He shoved out a fist that looked like an oversized ham.

“‘That sure is some paw,’ I said, doing a few quick finger exercises, ‘and after polishing up lounge lizards all day it is a relief to touch the hand that kayoed the Horrible Hittite. How would you like me to do this job—piecework or by the day?’

“‘Let your conscience be your guide,’ Samson said, settling back in his chair. ‘I’ve got nothing but time.’

“‘What are you doing in our fair city of Gaza?’ I asked pleasantly. ‘On a vacation? Or is the wife along?’

“‘And how?’ he frowned. ‘Shopping.’

“‘Pretty tough,’ I sighed, giving him a soulful look. ‘Just when I was hoping you and me might step out to-night and toy with a couple of hot dogs or something.’

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“‘Make it to-morrow, sweetness,’ he said. ‘She’s leaving in the morning.’”

“‘Don’t you two get along?’ I asked.

“‘She doesn’t understand me, that’s the trouble. Whenever I tell her an artist in my profession has got to have his lighter moments she just laughs and says the kind of lighter moments I mean, eating and drinking my fool head off, only make me heavier all the time.’”

“‘There’s something in that,’ I laughed, giving him a playful poke in the stomach. ‘The more waist the less speed, you know.’”

“He looked rather glum, but didn’t say anything.

“‘Why not sign me up for a sparring partner?’ I went on. ‘I’m free nights. And you sure do need to reduce. But if you keep up with *my* pace you’ll take off a lot more than weight. In fact, you may even lose your shirt.’”

“I said that for a purpose, of course. When you dare a man to spend money on you he generally tries to call your bluff, just to prove he isn’t a tightwad. So the next night Samson took me out to a couple of night clubs and danced his head off—to say nothing of my feet.

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“I have always been noted for my hospitality, so when we got home I asked him in. But I do not think it paid. Samson was terrible. As soon as he had had a few drinks his only idea was to tell you how good he was. If championships were awarded for conversation he ought to have been the world’s best bet. All he would have had to do was talk his man to death. I got a few samples that first night.

“‘I’m the strongest guy that ever lived,’ he exclaimed, scowling as though he meant to bite me. ‘There isn’t anything I’m afraid of. Take lions, for instance. Last week, while I was doing a little road work up around my training camp I ran into a couple of big ones. Ten feet high they were, at least, and hungry. The boys with me beat it back to camp at once, but lions don’t bother me any. I grabbed hold the two of ’em by their tails and swung ’em around for an hour like they was Indian clubs, just to give myself a little exercise.’

“‘Fancy that,’ I said. ‘Lions! Your wife must be awful proud of you.’

“‘She says I’m an awful liar,’ Samson grumbled.



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“‘Really,’ I laughed. ‘You seem to me pretty good at it.’”

“What a poet he would have made,” observed Sappho dreamily. “Such courage! Such imagination!”

“If you think that’s a good one,” Delilah went on, “you should have heard him tell about the time he met the snakes.

“‘There were two of ’em,’ he said, pouring himself another drink. ‘Boa constrictors, a hundred feet long if they was an inch. I was feeling particularly ugly that day on account of an argument I had just had with the wife, so I grabs them reptiles by the throat, one in each hand, and chokes ’em to death. Carries ’em back to camp to use as skipping ropes. Nothing like rope-skipping to keep a man in condition.’”

“‘You certainly are some snake charmer, Samson, old kid,’ I laughed. ‘Were these snakes you’re telling me about pink?’”

“‘No,’ he says, taking another drink. ‘At least only one of ’em. The other was a kind of sky blue. That’s the sort of snakes we have, up where I live. See ’em at night, mostly.’”

Phryne began to laugh.

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"He's still at it," she said. "The other day I met him at a party and he had Baron Munchausen on the ropes with a yarn about a bull fight."

"He would," Delilah resumed. "Bull was his middle name. But his prize story was the one about the bunch of strong-arm men who tried to hold him up outside the gates of Gaza. There were five hundred of them, he said, when he began the story. After a few more drinks he raised it to a thousand. According to his account of the struggle he finished off the entire lot with a piece of bone he picked up along the roadside."

"A funny bone, I suppose," Salome interrupted, with her usual giggle.

"He claimed it was the jawbone of an ass. I didn't contradict him. But when he told me about his fight with Abie Einstein, the Battling Greek, I gave up.

"'I cinched that bout with one swing,' he said, pouring himself another drink. 'Abie tipped the scales at three hundred pounds. In the second round I took him by the wrist and swung him clean over the ropes. He landed in

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a haystack half a mile away. The sports writers all agreed that was the greatest swing in the history of the fighting game.'

"I gave him a frosty look.

"'If you are as good as that, old dear,' I said, 'there is no reason why you should not do a little weight-lifting for me. I have a bungalow down at the beach with a five-thousand shekel mortgage on it. How about your raising that mortgage.'

"It didn't do any good. Samson only looked bored and told me that he never monkeyed with real estate. He was tight, drunk or sober.

"I put up with his hot air for a couple more weeks and then I began to get tired of it. Conversation never paid any girl's bills.

"'What are you supposed to be doing in town?' I said, 'besides seeing the bright lights?'

"'I'm here with my manager,' he replied, 'to sign up for a ten-round go with a Gaza boy who calls himself the One-Punch Kid, before he gets cold feet. Of course this kid is just a set-up for a guy like me and the only one punch in the struggle is going to be the one I slap him down with in the first round. But

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they tell me he is anxious to learn the fighting game from the ground up, so why should I not help him get an education?"

"That night Samson came into my flat with a letter in his hand.

"'Some kind friend,' he remarked, kicking my pet chow off the doormat, 'has told the wife about you and me being friends. She has written me a mean letter about it. How's this for a dirty crack?"

"'I have heard that you and this hooker down in Gaza are very intimate. See that she doesn't hook you, you poor fish.'

"'My wife is always cramping my style,' he went on, putting the letter back in his pocket. 'I got arrested five times last year on that woman's account. If they would only let us settle our affairs out of court it would be all right, but every time we start an argument somebody puts in a riot call.'"

"'What an ideal couple they must have been,'" remarked Queen Scheherazade. "Give and take, all the time."

"He must have depended a lot on home training," Delilah said. "He certainly didn't do any

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in Gaza. One day I asked him when he expected to begin.

“‘I don’t need to train none,’ he told me, ‘to put this bozo to sleep. As soon as I give him a couple of dirty looks he’ll jump out of the ring. My hardest work is going to be to carry home my share of the jack.’

“‘Better let me help you,’ I says. ‘I may look weak, but when it comes to carrying that kind of weight I am some little athlete.’

“‘I couldn’t think of allowing you to strain yourself, darling,’ Samson laughed, giving me a Jewish look. ‘I am a strong man, able to bear my own burdens. But stick around long enough and you’ll wear diamonds. Don’t forget that ten-carat ring I promised you.’

“‘If I had all the diamonds I’ve been promised,’ I said, ‘I could open a jewelry store. When do I get this rock?’

“‘The day I kayoes this One-Punch Kid,’ he laughs. ‘And just to make you feel better I will start in to-morrow and do some real work.’

“‘Shadow boxing?’ I asks him, but he doesn’t get my meaning any more than I expect to get that diamond ring he promised me.

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When it comes to diamonds this Samson guy is the sort would take you out to the ball park and tell you to have a good look at a real one.

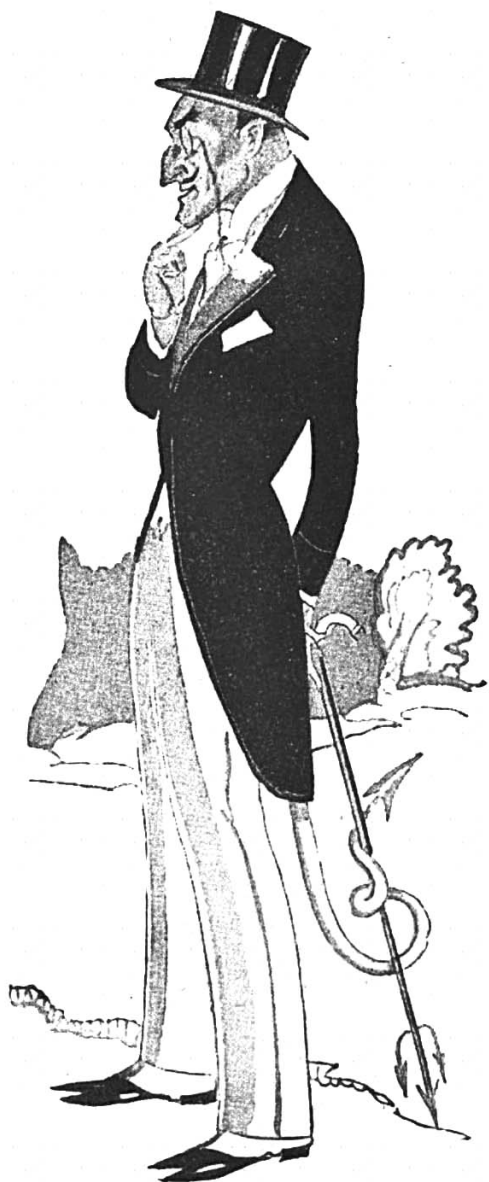
“One day, just before the fight, a slim fellow with hard-boiled eyes shows up at my flat.

“‘I am the One-Punch Kid’s manager, dearie,’ he says, ‘and here is a thousand shekels I am ready to hand to anybody who will help him win this set-to.’ He pulled a roll of smackers out of his pocket.

“‘Fine,’ I says. ‘It sure does cheer a girl to look at real money. But why do you show these pieces of eight to me?’

“‘Because, sweetness, there isn’t anybody closer to the champ right now than you are, see. You ought to know his weak points, if any. Of course, the way I figure it, this Samson is just a false alarm, who’s got everybody buffaloed into believing he’s a man-eater. When he steps into the ring and shakes that ugly mop of his, the other guy is generally licked before the fight starts. Ready to quit, after one look at him. If you ask me, I’d say the best way to call this Samson’s bluff would be to give him a haircut.’

“‘I’ve done my best to trim him for the past



*"You women," Satan exclaimed, "have had the impudence to send a petition to the Throne about that girl Marie!"*

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six weeks,' I says, 'and so far as I can see, you'd have to use ether!'

"The One-Punch's manager began to laugh.

" 'I am only kidding, when it comes to the haircut,' he says. 'But just the same this guy must have a weak spot somewheres. It may be his stomach, or it may be his legs. I don't know. But I'm ready to pay a thousand shekels to find out. How about it?'

" 'I'll let you know in the morning.' I said, thinking of that ten-carat ring Samson had promised me.

"That afternoon, when the champ blew into my flat and started the usual monologue about his strong points, I pulled his head down on my shoulder and began to run my fingers through his hair.

" 'This sure is some mop, big boy,' I said, 'and I begin to see now why you use banana oil on it. But I should think it might get in your way in a fight. Why do you not have it cut?' And I took hold of his thatch and gave it a pull.

" 'Lay off that!' he cried, letting out a yell you could have heard a block. 'If there's one



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thing I can't stand it's having anybody fool with my hair. I'm superstitious that way. A fortune teller once told me if I was to have it cut I'd never win another fight. Don't talk hair-cuts to me.'

"'All right,' I said. 'I won't. But I went to a fortune teller myself this morning and she told me that if a certain strong man didn't give me a diamond ring before sunset he'd meet with trouble from a dark woman. So how about you and me going right down to the Goliath Jewelry Shop and picking out that stone?'

"You might have thought, after all I'd done for that bird, listening to his stories, laughing at his jokes, carrying his breakfast up to him every morning and all, just as if I was married to him, he would of acted like a gentleman. But he didn't. All he did was to kick my pet chow in the ribs, say he couldn't be bothered with trifles like diamonds when he was training for a battle, and beat it. But I didn't care. I had found out what I wanted to know.'

"The next morning, when the One-Punch Kid's manager shows up at my flat he brings a young fellow with him that he introduces as

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the Kid himself. Some lad, believe me. One of these hot-eyed sheiks the minute he looked at me he had me hanging on the ropes. I lost my taste for Samson at once.

“‘Sit down here alongside me, big boy,’ I says, ‘and ask that manager of yours to go out and take a run around the block. While he is gone I will tell you how to win this fight.’

“The Kid did as I asked. When we were alone I started in to show him what it was that made Samson weak. It took me some time to convince him that I had the real dope but when I got through he was satisfied.

“‘This bunch of sweetness,’ he told his manager, when the slim guy came back, ‘has given me the lowdown, so far as Samson is concerned. I got that battle on ice right now. See that she gets a couple of choice ringside seats so she can witness the massacre.’

“The fight, which took place next day, was a scream.

“Samson came charging out of his corner at the bell, shaking his mop of hair and showing his teeth like a hungry hyena. He sure did look fierce, and when he cut loose with his famous

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right and bored in, the crowd began to yell, expecting to see the Kid go down for the count. But my boy friend was doing some clever foot-work.

“‘Quit making faces at me, you big gorilla,’ he said. ‘You haven’t got a chance.’ He sent a couple of fast ones to Samson’s stomach. ‘I trust my remarks sink in.’

“The champion gave a grunt but kept on coming. As he rushed by the Kid reached over and took a good grip on his thatch.

“‘Be your age, grandpop!’ he laughed, giving Samson’s hair a jerk.

“The crowd came to its feet with a roar. There stood the champion looking as foolish as a boy caught in the jam closet, naked from the ears up! I forgot to say that while I was playing with his hair that time I found out something the world didn’t know. *Samson wore a wig!*

“He was so surprised by what had happened that he never even saw the left hook One-Punch had started for his jaw. It caught him right on the button, and he passed out cold.

“‘Oh, you Kid!’ I shouted, starting to

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climb into the ring. But a stout dame with an unoccupied face stopped me.

“So you’re the piece of work he’s been spending his time on here in Gaza, are you?” she yelled, reaching for my back hair. ‘I heard he was asleep at the switch.’

“Time is the only thing he ever *did* spend on me,’ I told her, taking hold of her peroxide locks. ‘As for switches, I don’t use ’em, with *my* curves, so you’re off the track.’

“When they separated us, I had a fistful of blonde curls, while all she could show were a couple of hairpins.

“The Kid was leaning over the ropes waving Samson’s scalp.

“Give them curls back to her, baby doll,’ he called to me, ‘so she can make her old man another toupee. I’m going to keep this one as a souvenir.’ ”

A voice from the rear interrupted Delilah’s story and caused the club members to turn in surprise.

Before them stood Satan, his face convulsed with anger.

“You women,” he shouted, “have had the

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impudence to send a petition to the Throne, asking for the release of that girl Marie! What do you mean by going over my head in this way? I don't mind telling you that a certain Exalted Personage is very much put out over it. You know how irritated he gets whenever any of his decisions are questioned. The girl has been damned and damned she stays!"

"But," Eve ventured, "the man wasn't."

"A man can do a lot of things a woman can't," Satan exclaimed. "You ought to know that, by this time!" With a snort he turned away.

"What a pity," Eve whispered, gazing after him, "that Satan isn't a gentleman!"