

ROCKY BALBOA

Chapter 1 Living in the past

Mason Dixon never lost a boxing match. Tonight's fight was the same. The heavyweight champion hit his opponent again and again. He was faster and stronger. He was a better boxer. The champion punched hard with his right hand. His opponent fell to the floor. The fight was over.



Dixon held his arms high. He was the winner again. So why was the crowd booing him?

A sports commentator had the answer. 'Another quick and easy win for Mason Dixon,' he said, 'and the crowd is angry!'

The boos grew louder. Some people threw things at the champion and his team.

'Maybe next time Dixon will choose a real opponent,' the commentator continued. 'But is there anyone out there ...?'

The sound of boos followed the world champion as he left the ring. Mason Dixon was angry – very angry.



Rocky Balboa woke up early that morning. He left the cold house and walked slowly to his wife's grave. Rocky sat there for hours, lost in the past. His life seemed empty without Adrian.

At last he stood up and kissed the grave. Paulie, Adrian's brother, was waiting for Rocky. He didn't want to be there.

'It's three years since she died,' Rocky said to him. 'Time goes too fast.'

'Not fast enough,' said Paulie. 'Why isn't your son here?'

'He's busy,' Rocky answered. 'You're coming tonight, aren't you, Paulie?'

'I'm working!'

'It's Adrian's birthday,' Rocky said quietly.

Paulie couldn't say no. 'I'll be there,' he said.



Rocky's son, Robert, worked in a big office building in the centre of Philadelphia. Rocky waited for him at the busy entrance. He watched as Robert came in through a glass door. He was in a hurry. Robert was always in a hurry. An older businessman came up to him and shouted, 'Where have you been? You're late!' It was Robert's boss.

Rocky moved towards his son. 'Hey, Robert! How are you?'

Robert turned around. 'Good,' he said. But it was clear that he was uncomfortable.

'Do you want to go for a coffee?' Rocky asked.

'I'm really busy,' said Robert. 'Maybe later?'

'Great,' answered Rocky. 'Come to the restaurant tonight ...'

'I can't ...' said Robert.

At that moment Robert's boss joined them. 'I've waited a long time to meet you,' he said. 'I've asked your son many times.' Then he turned to Robert and gave him a camera. 'Here – take a photo of me with the great man.'

Robert's boss took Rocky's hand. 'It was good meeting you.'

When his boss left, Rocky looked into his son's eyes. 'Did I do something wrong?' he asked.

Robert was quiet for a moment. 'No,' he said finally, 'but sometimes it's not easy to be your son ...'

Rocky looked down sadly. Robert felt bad – he didn't want to hurt his father.

'I'll try and change my plans for tonight,' he said.



Years ago Rocky Balboa was rich and famous. He was the heavyweight boxing champion of the world. Those days ended a long time ago. Now he owned a small Italian

restaurant on the south side of Philadelphia. He named the restaurant 'Adrian's'. There were boxing pictures on the walls of the restaurant. It was like a museum of Rocky's boxing days.



That evening Rocky put on his best jacket and went out into the restaurant as usual. People liked to hear the stories of his days as a boxer. They ate their dinner while he told them about his most famous fights. He was telling one of these stories when a waiter gave him a message. Robert couldn't change his plans. He couldn't come to the restaurant that evening after all.



Mason Dixon had everything – lots of money, a big house, fast cars. He was rich and famous. He was the heavyweight champion of the world.

But tonight Dixon wanted to be alone. He sat in his expensive sports car and put a DVD into the player. He watched the end of his last fight. He listened to the boos of

the crowd and the words of the commentator.

Mason Dixon had everything, but it wasn't enough. He wanted people to remember him. He wanted to be a truly great boxer.



Later that night Rocky stood outside an old pet shop and looked into the dark window. Years ago Adrian worked in this shop. She was working here when Rocky first met her. He could remember it all – his silly jokes, Adrian's quiet voice, her big eyes.

'Have you finished yet?' called Paulie. The little man was waiting for Rocky and he wanted to leave. 'Come on! Let's go!'

Every year on Adrian's birthday, Rocky did the same thing. He visited the places of their past.

He looked across the street at Mickey's gym. Now the gym was closed and Mickey, his old trainer, was dead. 'How are you, Mick?' said Rocky to the night.



Next they went to Adrian's old house. Rocky pointed to the front door. 'I can remember it all,' he said. 'She was standing there. She was afraid, but she had a little smile.' Rocky stopped. He could almost see her.

'You said the same thing last year,' said Paulie. 'Come on!'

'It's OK,' said Rocky.

'No, it's not OK!' shouted Paulie.

Rocky turned and looked at him. 'What's wrong with you?'

'You're living in the past!' Paulie shouted. 'Yesterday wasn't so great!'

'It was to me!' answered Rocky.

'Sorry, Rocky. I can't do this,' Paulie said. Then he turned and left.

Rocky stood alone in the dark with the ghosts of his past.