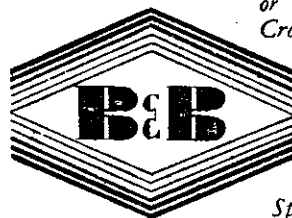




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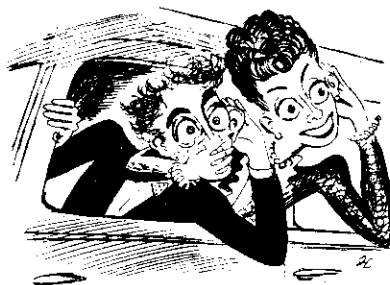
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THE SECRET LISTENERS

(Written for "The Listener" by GRACE ADAMS)

ALL our friends and acquaintances know how my husband and I abhor boxing and wrestling. That is just the trouble. We often had talks with people in the other flats about the sadism that is involved in these sports. One of our neighbours said boxing was all right, but wrestling was just the Brute in the Man coming out. This didn't coincide with our point of view, for boxing and wrestling were just the same to us.

One day, not long ago now, we were sitting alone in a milk bar when a number of "tough" boys came in and



crowded around the radio. They had the volume on full and we were forced to listen to a voice more excited than an announcer's at the finish of the Grand National. Words seemed to crash through the room, ". . . and that's the finish of round two. I don't think I am exaggerating to say that this is the most fast-moving and exciting fight a New Zealand crowd has seen for years. Just listen to them. I don't know who the favourite is but it's good clean fighting and they're both quick on their feet. In spite of the difference in weight they can take it and give it equally well." I peeped down at the boys who were listening so intently and felt sorry for them.

It was difficult trying to ignore the commentator's unnaturally loud voice. We talked on far-removed subjects until, out of the corner of my ear, I heard "Blood." We listened carefully. "I don't think it's serious but there's blood on his face . . . a cut near the eye and, as I said before, his nose is bleeding."

"His poor nose," I said, feeling mine sympathetically, "and he's the smallest one too."

"There's another on the nose and a right on the neck but it's a little too high for any damage." By this time we had finished our order and I was starting to feel ill, so we went outside and sat in the car.

Now . . . can I go on? Well, we opened the window nearest the milk bar and heard the rest of the fight. In no time the boxers had purched blood all

over themselves and I felt sick, but it was terribly exciting. We didn't tell a soul about this, for whatever would the people think?

A FORTNIGHT later it was announced that a wrestling match was to be broadcast. We were thrilled. On the appointed night we hovered near the radio in anticipation of more excitement. The boxing we'd heard previously was nothing compared with this. You could hear the crowd screaming as the fight went from one climax to another. Why, these men were giants and they got steadily wilder all the time. We were both perspiring and I kept elbow-jolting my husband without realising it.

"What's a head-lock? What's an arm-stretch? What's a full-nelson?" I'd ask breathlessly. So I became the victim and with each new hold felt more sorry for the two in the ring. Although puzzled, I was also pleased that my husband could demonstrate these holds. The commentator was so realistic we almost had ringside seats. He would shout ". . . and he's thumping the mat but it's no good, it's no good. Look out, he's up again and the hold has been completely reversed and there's plenty of pressure being applied." Our faces were drawn up in horror. "He's applying pressure," we would gasp, straining and struggling with the poor wrestler. Now there were head-locks being dealt out; now one was lifted bodily and slammed



on to the mat. There were elbow-jolts by the dozen on the face and holds that weakened the muscles. The end of the fight left us prostrate. Perhaps we had had too much excitement. Anyway we decided there and then that wrestling and boxing were horrible. They weren't even sporting. Fancy men pulling each other's hair in fury?

It had been an interesting experience to have listened to a wrestling match. Now we could decry such things properly. But the next morning a neighbour's voice sneered, "I'm ashamed of you two listening to that awful wrestling." Yes, we had been found out. The radio must have been too loud. We didn't try defending ourselves but said we were even more against such sport than ever.

To-night as we were sitting by the fire my husband said in a casual voice, "I heard that some boxing bouts are coming over the air to-night."

"Oh yes," I said casually.

After a brief pause he said, "It's 3YL." A look of mutual understanding passed between us. We shall take every precaution against our friends overhearing. If they do we shall never be able to hold up our heads again.

