

A RIVALRY THAT DEFINED THE GOLDEN AGE OF ROCK CLIMBING



ROBBINS VS. HARDING

**WRITTEN BY:
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"Getting to the top is nothing. The way you do it is everything."

– **Royal Robbins**

"Viewed objectively, climbing is totally absurd."

– **Warren Harding**

Based on a true story.

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EXT. ROCK FACE - YOSEMITE VALLEY - DAWN

CLOSE ON A CLIMBER holding on to a wall of granite. His eyes are intense, studying a crack that leads several feet up.

This is **ROYAL ROBBINS**, a stoic, refined 20-year-old with a buzz cut and big glasses. He's tired, sweating, sunburnt. BREATHING steadily in and out.

Behind him is the beautiful dawn of YOSEMITE VALLEY with the tops of trees low in the frame.

Robbins looks down. He's balancing precariously on the tips of his toes on a tiny ledge. We see where he is on the wall - about 100 FEET.

The manilla rope around his waist is attached to the wall 20 FEET BELOW, but otherwise, there's nothing but air between him and the rocky ground.

He looks up. Drilled into the rock, several feet away, is a permanent BOLT with a CARABINER attached. This is his what he's aiming for.

He pulls on his rope to make sure there's no drag, then climbs up, inching closer to the bolt... His foot shifts slightly... a small rock falls into the void... He hugs the wall tighter. Looks back up. Safety is a few short feet away.

Finally, he's within reach. He braces himself against the wall. Reaches down... But instead of grabbing his rope, he draws a HAMMER and CHISEL from his holster.

Robbins isn't trying to clip in. He's going to chop the bolt off the wall.

CLINK. CLINK. CLINK. CLANK!

Robbins pockets the bolt. He looks down. His nearest protection is now over 30 feet away. Another deep breath. Then he begins climbing again.

EXT. LEDGE - LATER

Robbins pulls himself up and sits down. His feet dangle into the abyss, gravity no longer pulling him towards death.

He looks out and smiles. He's alone, ruler of this vertical world. Nothing else matters.

Across the Valley is an iconic sight: The 2,000-foot NORTHWEST FACE OF HALF DOME. Robbins looks at it longingly. *One day...*

EXT. YOSEMITE VALLEY - CAMP 4 - MORNING

An old metal sign welcomes us to CAMP 4, a large wooded area of the Valley floor.

Robbins passes through...

EXT. CAMP 4 - LOWER AREA - "THE FLATS"

The part of the camp that is open and easily accessible from the road, rich with TOURISTS.

We get a preview of middle-class "glamping" in the 1950s: Campers with awnings; women in cat-eye glasses; overweight men with suspenders; cookouts with aprons; a 30-something trying out brand new hiking equipment.

They stare at Robbins like he's a hobo...

EXT. CAMP 4 - UPPER AREA - "THE SLOPE" - CONTINUOUS

The Slope is secluded, surrounded by trees and boulders. This area is more for climbers, and could be mistaken for a homeless encampment. Raggedy tents, tarps, blankets, second-hand camping equipment.

Scattered around fire pits and picnic tables sit groups of young men - dirty, laughing, carrying on. Some just waking up, some still drunk from the night before.

These are the DIRTBAG CLIMBERS of the 1950s. Vagabonds. Nonconformists. Pioneers. Camp 4 is their home. This is their way of life.

A couple Dirtbags acknowledge Robbins. Not intentionally rude, but we can tell Robbins is a bit of an outsider.

EXT. CAMP 4 - ROBBINS' CAMPSITE

Robbins' tent is on the far side of the Slope. He throws his gear off, pulls the chopped bolt out of his pocket and tosses it on the ground.

He pulls out a NOTEBOOK and flips through scribbled notes, crudely drawn routes, maps, photos. On a blank page he begins writing:

ETHICS OF CLIMBING**1. Minimal bolts**

He ponders for a moment, then reaches in his tent and pulls out a STRIP MAP of Half Dome. It's marked up with possible climbing routes, Xs marking bivouac spots on the wall, etc. He flips through his notebook comparing notes to the map.

GALLWAS (O.S.)

I always seem to find you alone.

Two men in their 20s approach: JERRY GALLWAS (svelte, but with a cherub-like quality) and JOE FITSCHEN (if Adam Scott was an outdoorsman).

Fitschen sees the expansion bolt on the ground.

FITSCHEN

Tell me you found that somewhere.

Robbins remains silent.

FITSCHEN (CONT'D)

Robbins, you're still new around here, you can't just go around altering established routes--

ROBBINS

I found a variation that doesn't require using a bolt.

FITSCHEN

One that other climbers can do, or just you?

No answer. The map has caught Gallwas's eye.

GALLWAS

Half Dome?

Fitschen picks it up, seeing Robbins' markings.

FITSCHEN

You're not considering climbing it...

ROBBINS

Why not?

FITSCHEN

I can think of lots of reasons. For starters it's never been done.

GALLWAS

Yeah Dick, George, and Jim got what, a hundred and fifty feet?

ROBBINS

It's possible. I know it is.

FITSCHEN

How much are you trying to suffer?

ROBBINS

Oh I don't mind suffering. Had a good dose of it on Yosemite Point Buttress a couple days ago. Where were you Joe, in a sleeping bag?

Fitschen, annoyed, turns to leave. Gallwas snickers.

GALLWAS

We're going to the Lodge if you want some grub.

ROBBINS

(beat)

I'll need a team.

They stop and look at Robbins, unsure if he's serious.

ROBBINS (CONT'D)

It's possible. And it's just daring us to try it.

FADE TO:

EXT. YOSEMITE VALLEY - TAFT POINT - MORNING

Soft sounds of nature caress the morning air at a beautiful viewpoint overlooking the entire Valley.

WARREN HARDING a wiry, ruggedly handsome man in his early 30s sits up from under a pile of blankets on the ground. Groggy, hair disheveled, hungover. He's got an air of James Dean made out of leather.

Several empty JUGS OF WINE lie on the ground beside him.

Harding stretches, then stands, REVEALING he's completely bottomless. He finds a jug with some wine left, picks it up, and takes a drink.

But he's not alone. Still asleep on the ground beside him is a former Miss Puerto Rico named MARIA (mid 30s).

She awakens as Harding walks bare-assed with his wine to look at the morning view.

(Note: Taft point is above the Valley, so the mountains that make up the Valley itself will appear "beneath" them.)

To the Northwest, the first light of the morning strikes the top of the East wall of EL CAPITAN.

After several moments, Maria, also naked but wrapped in blankets, approaches and sits beside Harding.

HARDING

Just look at how the early morning light hits that wall of El Capitan. It's the second most beautiful view in Yosemite.

MARIA

What's the first?

Harding reaches over and playfully pulls back the blanket to admire Maria's body. She laughs and covers back up.

MARIA (CONT'D)

You climb these mountains?

HARDING

A couple of them.
(re: El Capitan)
Not that one, no one has.

MARIA

It doesn't look possible.

HARDING

It may not be. But if someone does they'll be rich and famous, that's for sure.

MARIA

Why not you?

Harding grins. Maria is in awe of him.

MARIA (CONT'D)

Why do you do it?

HARDING

Climb mountains? Oh hell I don't know. I couldn't ever catch a ball or any of that stuff. I can do only what requires brute stupidity.

She laughs as he uses his "brute stupidity" to playfully tackle her to the ground. They roll around kissing and playing like horny children.

EXT. CALIFORNIA STATE ROUTE 41 / INT. JAGUAR - DAY

Harding and Maria speed down the road in his PURPLE JAGUAR. They are fast approaching...

INT. CADILLAC - SAME - CUTTING BACK AND FORTH

A SUBURBAN COUPLE in their 60s taking a leisurely drive, listening to "Life Is But A Dream" by the Harptones.

As the speedometer exceeds 100, Harding is hot on the Cadillac's tail, barely paying attention to the road.

The Suburban Couple don't even see Harding coming. At the last possible moment, the Jaguar *changes lanes and hurls past*, causing the Couple to nearly jump out of their skin.

Then Harding looks in his rear view mirror. LIGHTS. A police car is behind them.

EXT. CALIFORNIA STATE ROUTE 41 - SHOULDER - MOMENTS LATER

Harding has pulled over. A HIGHWAY PATROL OFFICER approaches.

OFFICER

Do you know how fast I clocked you as you passed that car back there?

HARDING

I hope you don't think I was racing him. I could have gone much faster.

Harding hands the Officer his drivers license. We see his picture with a devilish grin, and the name "WARREN HARDING."

EXT. CALIFORNIA STATE ROUTE 41

Back on the road, and once again accelerating to breakneck speeds, the Jaguar enters the WAWONA TUNNEL.

BLACK. Then...

EXT. YOSEMITE VALLEY - CONTINUOUS

One of the most breathtaking sights in the United States: "TUNNEL VIEW." An elevated viewpoint of Yosemite Valley.

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