



## Somebody Up There Likes Me, a Story of the Heart

### Description

Written and reviewed by Larry Gleeson

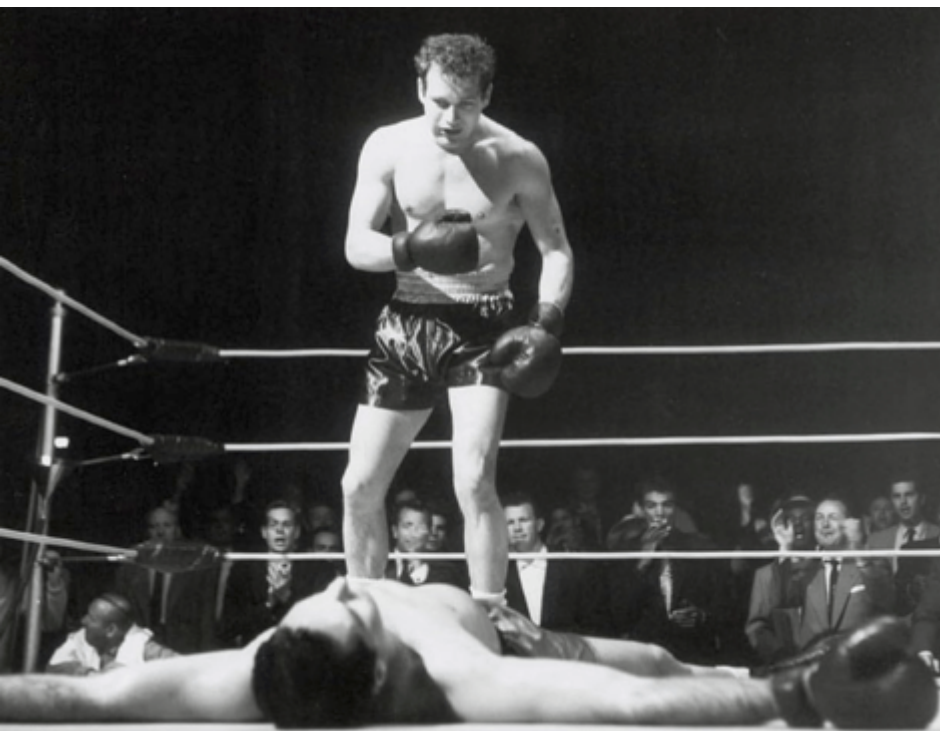
[\*Somebody Up There Likes Me\*](#), based on the autobiography of Rocky Graziano, is the story of Rocky Barbella, a.k.a, Rocky Graziano, a world champion middleweight boxer. Paul Newman stars in the leading role of Rocky. Other cast members include Pier Angeli (Norma), Everett Sloan (Irving Cohen), Eileen Heckart (Ma Barbella), Sal Mineo (Romolo), Harold J. Stone (Nick Barbella (, and an uncredited appearance by Steve McQueen (Fidel). Perry Como delivers a non-diegetic rendition of the film's title song to begin and end the film's narrative.



Young Rocky endures abuse from his father, a retired preliminary pugilist who has wine breath and only shows Rocky the back of his hand. Young Rocky is shown running away down an empty street. A dissolve transition shows a young man running towards camera eluding the police. Rocky has become a two-bit, wise guy, street thug terrorizing the neighborhood. The only person who hasn't given up on Rocky, at this point, is his mother, Ma Barbella. Rocky takes it too far and robs a school inside the pollock's turf.



After his arrest, Rocky is sent to a reformatory where he assaults a guard landing Rocky at the infamous Rikers Island, New York City's largest jail. Ma Barbella is at her wits end and tells Rocky he's the only one that can help himself. A remorseful Rocky promises to shape up with his catchphrase, "Don't worry about a thing." Upon his release, Rocky is forced to volunteer to be drafted for service during World War II. Rocky is not cut out for life in the Army. After knocking out a Captain, who threatened to teach Rocky a lesson, Rocky goes Absent Without Leave (AWOL) for several months.





While AWOL Rocky begins boxing to make money to "buy off" the Captain he knocked out. Before the MPs catch Rocky, he wins six fights by knockout. Rocky's professional career is put on hiatus as he is dishonorably discharged from the Army and is sentenced to one year of hard labor at Leavenworth. Rocky showed a lot of promise as a fighter drawing the attention of the boxing team coach at Leavenworth. The coach manages to convince Rocky to train and work. Rocky returns to fighting in the best shape of his life. The Army boxing coach infused into Rocky to use his hate inside the boxing ring to overcome his difficulties outside the ring.



*Somebody Up There Likes Me* is as much a redemptive love story as it is a boxing film. The film has some similarities thematically and narratively with *On the Waterfront*, starring Marlon Brando as a washed-up boxer, who took a dive, and Eva Marie Saint as the shy, reserved love interest with fortified morals. Norma, Rocky's love interest, is shy and reserved, but her heart is bursting with love for Rocky. Over time Rocky manages to channel his inner hate as a boxer to overcome his life's difficulties. When Rocky falters, the timid Norma exerts her powerful love to influence and to help Rocky see through his confusion. Overcoming childhood abuse and his inner hate, Rocky comes to love and, by the age of 28, is a husband, a father, a neighborhood hero, and a world champion middleweight boxer.



Interestingly, James Dean was originally cast in the title role but was replaced by Paul Newman following his untimely death. Also, a decision was made to move away from a Technicolor format on location in New York City to black and white format on studio sets, possibly to emphasize the good versus evil theme. With a runtime of one hour and fifty-three minutes, *Somebody Up There Likes Me*, doesn't come across as preachy. But certainly, cheeky at times. Seeing the interactions between opposites in Norma and Rocky is quite sweet. Highly recommended. Happy Valentine's Day!



### Category

1. #TCM
2. 31 Days of Oscar
3. television

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