

A TIP OF THE HAT
by
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A young boxer contemplates throwing a fight as he reminisces on his grandfather's childhood advice.

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INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

We see the hands of a man nervously fidgeting with his fingers. They are the bruised hands of a boxer.

The nervous tapping of his foot intertwines with the tick of the second hand from the wall clock. He bites his nails.

A hand is laid on the bouncing knee. The knee stops abruptly.

For the first time we see the handsome, rugged face of 19 year old, FRANCESCO "FRANKIE" D'SALVATORE. He looks up at GINO, his 50 year old boxing trainer, as if he forgot he wasn't the only one in the room. They share a look as if they want to say something to each other but neither speaks. GINO breaks the silence first.

GINO

It's just one match kid.

FRANKIE

Is it?

The double doors at the end of the room burst open revealing a flurry of media and press in the hallway. Each reporter is practically stepping on each other trying to get their questions answered. The rapid fire questions are accompanied by a frenzy of camera flashes. The door closes behind BIG TONY, mafia don and promoter of tonight's fight, hushing the sounds of the crowd. BIG TONY is accompanied by MARCO, his right hand man and muscle.

BIG TONY

Frankie!! My boy! They're waiting for you. Can't wait to talk about David vs Goliath. Ha ha! A lot of money riding on this fight of yours tonight. Big money going the way of somebody who happen to bet EXACTLY the way this fight goes.

BIG TONY lets that sink in for FRANKIE for a second.

BIG TONY

I bet your ma is going to be watching tonight. Beatrice Marie D'Salvatore at 635 Sycamore Lane. Hey! Maybe I'll have Marco here sit outside her house tonight until we see how this fight ends. You know, just to keep her safe.

BIG TONY walks closer to FRANKIE and cups his face in his hands.

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BIG TONY
Your grandfather would be real
proud of you. I know you're going
to do the right thing.

BIG TONY drops his hands and they stare at each other for a moment. They both know that was much more of a threat than encouraging.

BIG TONY
Alright kid! You better get out
there. Your adoring fans await.

BIG TONY and MARCO head towards the exit at the other end of the locker room as GINO steers FRANKIE towards the reporters.

GINO
It's only one match kid. You're
still young.

They have already opened the doors and a camera flash explodes in FRANKIE's face.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. BOXING GYM - DAY

LORENZO, FRANKIE's grandfather in his patented fedora, is seen snapping a picture of 12 year old FRANKIE inside of a boxing ring. The gym has seen better days but there is no place that feels more like home for these two. Young FRANKIE is posing for the photo in his trunks, robe and gloves completely devoid of a smile.

LORENZO
(in a thick Italian accent)
What's a matter Francesco?

Little FRANKIE awkwardly shuffles his feet.

FRANKIE
What if I lose 'cuz I'm so little?

LORENZO
What?! Too little! Don't you dare
say you're too little.

FRANKIE
Yeah but...

LORENZO
(cuts him off)
Yeah but nothing.
(MORE)

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LORENZO (CONT'D)

You my boy are a D'Salvatore. What you got in here (tapping FRANKIE on the chest) makes you bigger than any of those boys. Now let me hear you say it.

FRANKIE

(meekly)

I'm a D'Salvatore.

LORENZO

LOUDER!

FRANKIE

I'M A D'SALVATORE!!!!

LORENZO

(tips his hat to FRANKIE)

You bet you are!

LORENZO begins to lightly box with his grandson. He then steps back with a proud smile as FRANKIE continues to shadow box around the ring. He lifts the camera hanging around his neck to take another photo. FLASH!

END FLASHBACK.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

FRANKIE is straddling a bench in the middle of the locker room absentmindedly running a quarter across his knuckles as GINO nervously paces the room. The tick, tick, tick of the wall clock reminds him that the fight is only a couple of hours away.

GINO

You just gonna sit there pouting?

FRANKIE looks over at GINO with a look of disapproval but doesn't respond. He begins to turn the quarter faster and faster. What else can he do with his frustration?

GINO

You're playing in the big leagues now kid. This is just how it is. You scratch their back, they scratch yours.

FRANKIE

You're saying I gotta lie to get ahead?

GINO

I'm SAYING boxing is a business and you gotta play by the rules. You'll see. A few years from now this will just be a blip on the radar. When you're the Goliath name on the fight, you won't even remember it.

FRANKIE tosses the quarter back and forth hand to hand just to have something to do with his hands.

GINO

Kid, look at me.

FRANKIE stops all movement and stares at GINO.

GINO

You're too good a fighter to throw your career away over pride. Mark my words, this is gonna be good for you. I predict big things for you Frankie. You're going places.

FRANKIE takes that in and sends the quarter for a spin on the bench. He stares at it as it makes figure eights on the bench.

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

EXT. EMPTY PARKING LOT - DAY

A green Buick DeSoto is seen doing doughnuts in the empty lot. The sounds of squealing tires can be heard for miles. The car comes to a wild stop.

INT./EXT. LORENZO'S DESOTO - DAY [PARKED]

LORENZO, never without his fedora, is behind the wheel with now 14 year old FRANKIE in the passenger seat. The two are laughing hysterically.

LORENZO

Don't tell your mother!

FRANKIE

(smirking)

Tell her what?

Lorenzo smiles at him. Gotta love this kid! Lorenzo turns a bit more serious for a moment.

LORENZO

You did good Friday night son.

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FRANKIE
C'mon Nonno.

LORENZO
No son, I mean it. That was a good fight. You kept your hands up. I was real proud of you. You keep fighting like that, boxing can really take you places.

FRANKIE
Yeah right! Ain't nobody in this family been nowhere since you came over.

LORENZO
You can be the one to change that. You got smarts and a good head on shoulders. People need to hear what you got to say. You were made for big things. And why my boy is that?

FRANKIE
(grinning)
'Cuz I'm a D'Salvatore.

LORENZO
I'm sorry. Did you say something?
I couldn't hear you.

FRANKIE
(louder)
'Cuz I'm a D'Salvatore!

LORENZO
(tips his hat to FRANKIE)
You bet you are!
(then)
Let's do it again.

The DeSoto takes off like a rocket and the doughnuts begin. This time it's hard to tell which is louder, the tire squeals or the two men's cheers. LORENZO blares the horn.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

BAM! FRANKIE slams the locker door. He is half dressed from where he has started to get ready for tonight's fight. GINO is now sitting on the bench unlacing FRANKIE's shoes.

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FRANKIE

I still ain't sure about this
Gino.

GINO

Sure about what?

FRANKIE

You know what I'm talking about
Gino.

GINO

I know you got a job to do
tonight. That's what I know.

GINO tosses FRANKIE's shoes at him.

GINO

Big Tony owns every boxing match
and every boxer from here to the
Mason Dixon Line. If he says you
ain't winning tonight, you ain't
winning tonight. End of story.

FRANKIE

It ain't right Gino. It ain't even
legal.

GINO

Legal don't matter in boxing.
Don't be stupid kid. Take the loss
tonight and live to fight another
day. You ain't got nothing to be
afraid of.

FRANKIE starts to walk away from GINO. GINO yells after him.

GINO

Hey!

FRANKIE ignores him and heads out of the locker room. GINO
yells again louder and snaps his fingers to get FRANKIE to stop
and turn back.

GINO

Hey!

BEGIN FLASHBACK:

INT. FUNERAL HOME - DAY

Fingers snap in front of the face of now 17 year old FRANKIE.
He is dressed in a black suit and has clearly been crying.

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The fingers snapping in front of his face shake him back to reality. The fingers belong to NICO, LORENZO's best friend.

NICO
Hey! How ya doing kid?

FRANKIE doesn't answer but stares straight ahead. The room is filled with a few empty chairs set up for a service. In front of those chairs is a casket with LORENZO's patented fedora laying on top.

NICO
He was a good man your Nonno.
Everything I know I learned from
him.

NICO was hoping this would prompt some kind of response from FRANKIE, but he just stares at the casket not moving. NICO tries a different tactic.

NICO
I hear you're fighting that
Giovanni kid this weekend. He's
got a mean left hook but I think
you could take him.

FRANKIE never looks away from the casket.

NICO
Alright, well, you call me if you
need anything. And good luck this
weekend. You ain't got nothing to
be afraid of.

NICO heads toward the door.

FRANKIE
(under his breath)
I ain't never scared. I'm a
D'Salvatore.

The fedora on the casket sits as weight that FRANKIE can't bring himself to look away from.

END FLASHBACK.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - NIGHT

LORENZO's fedora is sitting on the top shelf of an open locker. The sounds of a sold out crowd raptly anticipating a great fight can be heard. FRANKIE is standing at the locker fully dressed for tonight's fight. He's made up his mind. FRANKIE mimes tipping his hat towards the fedora.

FRANKIE

This one's for you Nonno.

The door to the locker room opens and in walks BIG TONY and some new THUG FOR HIRE. His grand entrance brings in the noise of the arena and reveals where GINO has nervously been pacing in the corner. BIG TONY heads straight for FRANKIE who is loosening himself up and preparing for tonight's fight.

BIG TONY

There he is! You ready kid?

GINO

(always trying to get in BIG
TONY's good graces)

Yeah. He's ready. Ain't you kid?

FRANKIE stares BIG TONY straight in the eye with a smile and a confidence that makes BIG TONY a little nervous.

FRANKIE

So ready.

FRANKIE never looks away from BIG TONY.

BIG TONY

Lotta people out there. Their
calling this the fight of the
decade. Ha!

BIG TONY laughs as if he has just made some hysterical joke. Even THUG FOR HIRE looks amused.

FRANKIE

Well we better get going then. We
wouldn't want to keep these people
waiting.

BIG TONY

You know what you gotta do here
kid, right?

FRANKIE

I ain't never been more sure of
nothing in my life.

FRANKIE maintains that calm, cool smile.

BIG TONY

Now wait a minute kid. Don't go
getting no big ideas.

FRANKIE heads to the door.

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FRANKIE
C'mon Gino. Let's give these
people what they came for.

GINO sheepishly runs after FRANKIE as he heads out of the door.

INT. ARENA HALL - NIGHT

The crowd can be seen down the hall waving banners and signs. The energy is electric. FRANKIE begins to hype the crowd up as he heads towards them which only makes their roar get louder. GINO catches up and massages FRANKIE's shoulders to help loosen him up.

BIG TONY comes out of the locker room and screams down the hall to FRANKIE.

BIG TONY
You better watch yourself kid. I
own you!

FRANKIE bangs his gloves together. He has never been more ready to fight.

FRANKIE
Nobody owns me. I'm a D'Salvatore.

BLACKOUT.:

DING! DING! DING!