

# Ivory Towers

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A Clayton Lane Case

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# Dedication

To my wife, Calie, who put up with me, cried with me, and stood by me when I had hit bottom. I love you so much, and the fact that you never once rolled your eyes at me when I excitedly rambled on about my progress is a testament to our love.

To my mom and dad, for always believing in me and giving me the support to be myself, I love you both. Mom, you knew that I could do this, and you never questioned my talent. Dad, you are the inspiration for the character of Clayton Lane. You taught me to be the kind, caring man I am today, but also taught me to be tough and to stand up for myself.

To all my friends who have been in my life, especially those who were here to help me when I fell, thank you. You were all wonderful and have been a shining part of my life.

Finally, to you, the reader. Obviously I wouldn't be anywhere without you. I hope you enjoy. I've sat on this story for over six years, and I've finally allowed it to bloom into this. I'm very proud of this story, and I hope that you enjoy reading it as much as I enjoyed writing it.

## Chapter 1

Round 4 was even more action packed than Round 3. Ernie DeMott was a good champ, he was a fight lovers champ to be sure, but there was something to be said about this black fellow, and “Thundering” Joe Thomas sure as hell was living up to his epithet.

DeMott had put up a fight in the third after losing the first two 10-8 and 10-9, but his face was taking a pummeling. Joe Thomas was too fast for the “Brooklyn Buzzsaw” and took DeMott out of his game plan which was “hit really hard and knock ‘em out”. It sounded like his corner knew the end was near as well, because you could hear his trainer yelling at Ernie to keep his distance and swing.

The warning bell rang, signaling ten seconds left in the round. It was a round decidedly won by Thundering Joe, but he didn’t seem that convinced. Clem Schnelling, the radio blow-by-blow announcer, was whipped into a frenzy as Thomas easily closed the distance on DeMott, getting inside his range, and landed a staggering eleven straight head strikes before delivering a short, strong hook to the liver that staggered the champion. The bell rang, signaling the end of the round.

“My goodness, fight fans, what we are witnessing is no boxing match, but the scourging of a good man at the hands of an absolute animal. Joe Thomas, underdog, challenger, relative unknown, is carving up champion Ernie ‘Brooklyn Buzzsaw’ DeMott like a Christmas goose.”

A swig of Old Fitzgerald chased with a pull from a Lucky Strike was enough to keep the November chill at bay. The radiator was busted, and I hadn’t had the time to fix it. I could have called Fruity up to take a look, but that would mean that awkward conversation about three month’s back rent, which I had the money for, just not the willingness to give up (a man’s gotta drink, ya know).

“DeMott’s cornerman, Teddy Franco, looks mighty troubled here, ladies and gents. Franco does not seem too keen on allowing his boy back out there to face another round of thunder from the challenger. DeMott seems to have a mouse over his left eye and his left cheek has been trickling blood since the start of the second round. He looks worse than the Fuhrer in a Berlin bunker.

“DeMott is arguing with his trainer and the ring doctor, he is too proud of a champion to throw in the towel. Say what you will about the way this fight has gone, but Ernie DeMott is no quitter. He’s back up on his feet, though his legs look like they were made of spaghetti noodles.

“Our official, Vinny LaVeccia, has called the two back to the center of the ring. Joe Thomas looks as fresh as a spring daisy, and Ernie DeMott, well, the less said about his physical condition the better. There’s the bell, and the two square up once again!”

Round 5 was much of the same; DeMott was used as a punching bag, giving little resistance to the younger, faster, stronger Thomas. The New York crowd, who were decidedly pro-DeMott in the beginning, now began to cheer as the young black fighter unloaded swift combinations and heavy haymakers.

The round ended with DeMott barely standing and the two trudged back to their corners. I pulled another swig from the bottle of Old Fitzgerald and leaned back in my chair, tipping my hat over my face. This was a foregone conclusion; Thomas would win this one either by corner stoppage or decision unless DeMott could unravel the mystery of his speed and strikes to land the lights-out punch.

I hadn't realized I had dozed off until I heard Clem state that the fight was entering Round 8. I sat upright in my chair and tried to blink away the fog that had settled on my mind. As the fog was still clearing up, there came a knock at the door.

"That you, Fruity," I called out, hoping that the landlord was already asleep. To my relief, there came an unfamiliar voice in reply.

"N-no, not Fruity, sir."

"It opens," I returned. The door swung open slowly, and a nebbish little man stepped through. He was slumped over, his shoulders rolled forward, his head down, he clutched his hat in his hands for dear life. He stood in the doorway, unsure or afraid to enter completely.

“Come on in, pal, have a seat.” I waved him over, reassuring him as I kicked the chair out from under the desk. He nodded, never looking up at me, always side to side, as if he were a deer watching for wolves. He shuffled in and gingerly sat down.

“Whiskey,” I asked as I poured a shot into a clean(ish) glass. I slid the drink over to him. He looked at the glass intently, as if the answer to the universe was there, swirling around in the hooch. He fingered the rim of the glass nervously.

“Clayton Lane, yeah,” he finally asked, still not looking up. “You- you’re a private dick?”

“That I am,” I placed a Lucky Strike in my mouth and used a match to light the cig. “What can I help you with, Mr.-”

“Jensen. Harvey Jensen.”

It seemed to take all his courage to tell me his name. Harvey finally raised the glass of whiskey and downed it fast. He hissed at the burn and slid the empty glass back to me, tapping the table for another. I complied.

“Well, Mr. Jensen,” I continued as I served him up another shot of courage, “what can I do for you tonight?”

“Is that the DeMott-Thomas fight?”

I looked at him confused before I remembered I still had the radio on. I glanced at the old Zenith and then back to him.

“Yes, sir. You a fight fan?”

Harvey shook his head.

“Not particularly-”

He had given up some interesting information without saying much.

“You a betting man, there, Mr. Jensen?”

Jensen swallowed the second drink and began to stand up from the chair.

“I-I think I should, eh, go-”

I stood and circled around the table, making my way between Jensen and the door, hands in my pockets so as to not appear intimidating.

“Listen, Mr. Jensen, it isn’t my business if you gamble, I ain’t the vice squad. Just relax, sit back down, and tell me why you came here, yeah?”

Jensen was shaking something fierce. I offered him a cig and a light. He puffed away at the cigarette, gradually relaxing. He took his seat once more, glancing over at the radio.

“-and another left jab. DeMott is reeling but still on his feet. For what it’s worth, the champ has yet to go to the canvas in this fight, but Joe Thomas has been in complete control of the bout so far, and it’s only a matter of time before we see DeMott on the mat!”

Jensen winced again.

“I put \$50 on DeMott to win. Who knew that colored fella had it in him?”

I reached back and turned the radio off. Jensen looked appalled at first, but then remembered where he was and why he was here. He looked at me for the first time, a sheepish countenance across his face.

“Harvey, let’s get down to brass tacks, yeah? What brings you here?”

“Well- I- I need your expertise to, eh- my wife is missing.”

I pulled a pencil and a pad of paper from the desk, nodding at Harvey to continue.

“She, eh, she stepped out on me the other night. Went out to ‘get some air’ and never came back.”

I jotted a note down then eyed Harvey with suspicion.

“So, your wife goes out, doesn’t come back, you come to a P.I. and you are more interested in a boxing match than you are about filing a case? That doesn’t seem to really stack up, Harv.”

Harvey grinned weakly.

“She- she does this a lot. Steps out, I mean. She will be gone for a few days at a time. Usually ends up at a friend’s house to blow off steam before she comes back and acts like nothing happened.”

I took more notes.

“Not the picture of marital bliss,” I muttered. “So if this happens a lot, why come to me? Why not wait it out?”

“I had been waiting, you see, but it’s been, eh, longer than usual. She left a week ago yesterday. She’s never been gone this long. I’m worried something might have, eh, happened to her!”

More notes.

“You ever think maybe she stepped out for good?”

Harvey shook his head.

“She wouldn’t do that! She loves me.”

He sounded less than convinced, as if saying it out loud would make it true. It was almost as if he did believe she was gone.

“It sure sounds like she does. So, last week Thursday your wife leaves. You come to me to see if I can track her down. Let’s get some information now. Name, age, hair color, eye color, what she was last seen wearing, frequent haunts, friend’s names and addresses, anything you can think of, Harv.”

Harvey closed his eyes hard in deep concentration.

“Her name is Isadore. Jensen, obviously, but her maiden name is Leclercq. She’s 30. No, 28! Or, no, she’s 29. Eh, her hair is brown. Dark brown. Chestnut, I think she calls it. Her eyes are- eh, oh good God- green! No, hazel. She was wearing a red dress with black accents and sleeves and a white hat when she went out. I would say she probably went to either *Rue de Seine* or *Gino’s*, she loves both places. *Rue de Seine* is a French joint, kind of ritzy and high priced. She knows the maitre-d there; his name is something French like Jaques or Jean. *Gino’s* is a dive we used to frequent when we were just married. A hole in the wall down in the South Valley.”

He sucked on his Camel, blowing the smoke out in a long exhale.

“Henri! That’s the maitre-d’s name! Henri! Anyway, she knows Henri, I have no idea what his last name is or where he lives. She has a friend named Claudia Noe, a girl she knew when they lived in Canada before we met.”

“She’s Canadian?”

Harvey nodded.

“Yes. We met during the war when I was sent to Montreal to help the Royal Canadian Air Force develop new fighter planes. I’m an engineer, you see.”

I nodded and jotted more notes.

“So you met in Canada. What else?”

“Well, we only knew each other for a few months before we got married. She insisted on it. She and I really hit it off, and she was intrigued with my work. She was excited to move to America. We got married in a church there in Montreal and we eventually moved to the States.”

I scribbled furiously, Harvey was a fast, nervous talker.

“And when did the issue of her leaving for days on end begin?”

“Well, I guess it was right away, a few months after we settled here. She said it was homesickness and that she needed to be alone to gather her thoughts. She would come back, all was well for several months, then she would do it all over again. I started to think her homesickness was a fabrication.”

He was silent for a moment before continuing.

“Truth be told, Mr. Lane, my gambling probably compounded the issues. I have a- rather hard time keeping money, mostly from betting the horses and baseball games. That has made Isadore hotter than hell a few times.”

I set down the pencil and stared Harvey in the eyes. I wanted to get a sense of who he was, there was a certain, resonating aura about him that was unsettling, or at least overwhelming, that I couldn't quite pinpoint. His hesitancy to meet my gaze was suspicious, but he did finally lock eyes with me.

“Harvey,” I said, still holding his stare, “I feel there is something that you aren't exactly sharing with me. I'm not sure if it's because you are embarrassed or if it's something, let's say, incriminating, but you are holding out on me. If you want this relationship to work, both ours and yours with your wife, you need to be clean with me.”

Harvey broke the deadlock, letting his eyes drop to the desk. He clamped his eyes shut and pressed the heels of his palms to them, shaking his head. He let out a quivering sigh before he began to speak.

“Honest truth here, Mr. Lane, when we met, it wasn't exactly on the up-and-up.”

He trailed off. I allowed him to gather his confidence.

“See, she was- was a-”

He snapped his eyes back up, catching sight of the bottle of whiskey. His hand shot out like a cobra striking at its prey, caught the bottle up in his hand, and slammed it back, gulping down the majority of the remaining liquor.

“She was a hooker. A prostitute.”

I picked up the pencil and jotted that down with my notes. I wasn't here to judge, and I certainly wasn't here to play moral police. God knows I've spent my time in some seedy places with some seedy people. So the guy needed the company of a woman.

“Problem is that I also lied earlier. She isn't 28, she's 24. She was 14 when I bought her for the first time.”

I stopped writing, glanced up at Harvey, then went back to taking notes.

“I- I didn't know she was that young, honest to God! I'm not a pervert! But, damn it was she beautiful. And she was good. See, I was 35 at the time, and I had only been with one woman, and not even “all the way” as the boys would say. See, but Isadore was gorgeous and voluptuous and she was interested in me. Or so she said. She asked to see me again, and so we made it a weekly rendezvous, then it was twice weekly, then nearly every night. She told me she wanted to get out of Canada, move to America with some well off yankee and get away from the streets of Montreal. That's why I married her. We forged a birth certificate stating that she was 18 and got hitched.

“I was eventually transferred to Tennessee to work on some specs for a large bomber for a “special assignment”, and halfway through was transferred out to work for Sandia Laboratories.”

My eyes zipped over the notes I had taken, soaking up all the information therein. I leaned back, pad in hand and took a deep breath.

“So, the facts are, and I’m sure they are *all* facts now, that you met Ms. Leclercq in Canada where you were working in conjunction with the Royal Canadian Air Force as an aeronautical engineer. Your first encounter with Ms. Leclercq was as a solicitor for a sexual encounter in exchange for money. Ms. Leclercq revealed to you that she was under the minimum age of consent, in this case 14 years of age, and expressed a desire to abscond from Canada to the United States to leave her life as a prostitute. You illegally procured falsified government documents, were wed under false pretenses, and were reassigned for your work from Canada to Tennessee, then here. Is all this correct, Mr. Jensen?”

Harvey was dumbfounded, his cheeks were starting to grow rosy red and his eyes darting all over the room in an attempt to avoid my gaze.

“Well, when you put it that way-”

“You have been ‘married’ for ten years, or a span thereabout, from what you told me and she has had been a habitual absconder. I asked before, Harv, and I’m going to ask again, because I don’t want to run myself ragged looking for a dame that decided to show a clean pair of heels, are you sure she didn’t leg it for keeps?”

Harvey still evaded my gaze.

“She loves me,” he murmured.

I could barely make it out, and it seemed more of Harvey trying to reassure himself than he was trying to convince me. This guy was a real sad sack, but damn it if I didn’t feel sorry for the schmuck. I think he really fell in love with a pro. That’s rule

*numero uno* Harv; never fall for a chippy. I sighed and leaned forward, taking the bottle from old Harv and drawing the last swig.

“Alright,” I said through the vapors of the cheap whiskey, “I’ll take the case, Harvey. Let me be honest with you, I don’t foresee myself finding Isadore, and if I do, I don’t think she’s gonna be coming back home. Say I do find her and that’s the case, I want you to be ready for the bad news, got me?”

Tears dropped silently from his eyes as he hung his head and gave a weak mutter in response. I took this as a yes.

“Now, if I find her and I can bring her back, terrific, but I just want you to be ready for the worst. I ain’t shy to say that most cases of significant others running off often end up being a case of buyer’s remorse or fooling around.”

Harvey began to sob quietly. His shoulders bounced up and down as he lamented over the idea of his better half running out for good. I almost felt a little sorry for the schmuck.

“However,” I said, deciding to leave the fella with a little hope, “there are many cases that end up fine, that the one that ran off just needed some time. Isadore is young, and maybe she just needs some time to sow her wild oats. It isn’t all doom and gloom.”

Although he kept his head hung down, I could tell there was a change in his demeanor. He rubbed his eyes and sniffled. He looked up, I caught a glimmer of hope in his eyes.

“What about payment, Mr. Lane?”

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