

01/22/21

January threatens Denver. Her clouds loom at the edge of the divide, promising the city and surrounding areas a blanket of thick winter snow. Despite the midday sun and its glare, the thirty-six degree drifts cut through the skin. Less like a knife. More like a welding torch. Last year, I had seen the Denver Botanical Garden in all of its vibrancy, its vast array of colors a kaleidoscope of life born through petals; today, the naked, dark brown branches contrast against the ash colored sky, jutting out like fingers begging for their suffering to end. Death visited each inch, an unwelcome guest, and ran his fingers over every splinter.

They remind me of my own bones:
Quiet. Aching, Promising that maybe
one day they will bloom.

They won't.
I've learned that.

It is a wonderful feeling, to always feel withered, to know your own delicacy despite every fighting breath. That's the secret we all refuse to share and all take to our graves. I could count on all of my counterparts to downplay their own mortality. They do it every week.

It's fair to say I act as though I do not know. But I do. I know more intimately than most. I am no stranger to ambulances or hospital beds. I should be underground instead of in Denver. Maybe they're just pretending. Maybe they're scared too.

Maybe it's just me.

Maybe my hijinks are an attempt to test that fate, maybe my subconscious is telling me that if I cheat my body, I will feel something. Perhaps if I prod destiny with a fucking stick I will find myself reveling in excitement. At the end of the day, all I feel is numb.

At one point I wanted this.

Though, I suppose it isn't exactly the same. Before, I passed through every day like a flurry. I had no destination, no end game. I appeared and disappeared with the same brevity. I did not seek any particular whim or challenge, aside from my vices. I woke up with the express purpose of dulling my senses, of escaping parts of me I didn't want to recognize. And when I was done, I would go back to sleep, just to do it again. My life is a missing person. Years taken hostage and murdered, hidden beneath the house. I am sure that if I did recall them, I would try to wipe them out again.

I'll never change.

But this feeling? This is different.
At least when I was sleeping or nodding off
A few minutes felt good.
This is not a comfortable numb.
It is a burden of exhaustion, of boredom,
of meaningless wandering.

How cliché.

I stand from the wooden bench. Beside me, concrete pillars hold a roof, its edges inspired by Japanese architecture. I stare out into the frozen pond and shiver.

If you jump, you'll fall through.

My muscles tense. My right foot sweeps forward, and the sole of my boot taps lightly against the ice. Why does this feel so familiar? My heart pounds in my temple.

I pull my foot back onto the sidewalk.

I find myself in a strange city, alone,
chasing someone I think will interest me.

April. It was April 2020.

It was the week before Cold Blooded. Only nine months ago I stood in Lafayette Park, waiting. It was warm. Festive. I crept around New Orleans, waiting to finally get to feel something new.

Why had I gone through all of the trouble? I tormented Ace Marshall for weeks after his Trios Tournament victory with David and Glory. During that match, I realized I had to get closer, to latch on and syphon as much excitement from him as I could.

Look how that turned out.

Cat and mouse is not the type of relationship I am after. It isn't accurate. This isn't hunter and hunted. No. That's too rudimentary. I want something more than to simply toy with an easy meal. That isn't fun. I want something more. I am a cat chasing a dog.

I was wrong.
I've been making a habit being that way.

How pathetic.
I'm not any different than the seasons.
I'm just going in circles.

--

1/23/21

Darkness. It envelopes the shot like a blanket. Slowly, a soft yellow light creeps into frame, settling in the middle. Off camera, there is rustling. Then a crash of metal, and the soft light to complete blackness with a shatter.

"Fuck," Elizabeth mutters through gritted teeth. There is more rustling. Someone flicks on the room lights. What once looked ominous is revealed as a hotel Datura begrudgingly sulks on screen, eyebrows furrowed.

"That was going to be such an awesome shot. I was going to look so mysterious." She slaps her forehead and sighs, throwing her gaze to the ceiling. "Fine. We improvise. You are an actor. You

are a star." She inhales deeply and clasps her hands in front of her face.

"Kim, the question is: would you consider this a date? Because I consider this a date." Datura folds all but her pointer fingers, then rests them on her lips. "I have been waiting so long for this chance, and I have to say, the anticipation is tearing at me."

"I remember our first real moment. Do you? God, it's already been a month. December 20th!" Her hands tap into tiny claps. "Some people know when they lock eyes. Some people when their hands brush, ever so slightly, as they pass each other by. Some know the first time they look. I knew when the staple gun went off." She turns her body slightly, offering the camera a view of her butt. She points at the exact spot the staple went in.

"It was right here. That was the most...ridiculous pain I have felt in years, and then, when I thought it couldn't get any better, we threw fireballs at each other. At the same time. Twinsies." She offers a cutesy giggle.

"Week in and week out we've been trying to kill each other, and now, our first official date. This is so exciting. It's felt like forever to get here." Elizabeth inhales deeply. Then exhales. "Calm down, Elizabeth. You're making a scene." She turns around for a moment and clears her throat. It is a painfully awkward pause before she turns back.

"Okay. Since we're here, I have another question."

"Do you remember what you asked Blake Mason before the Under Attack? Her mannerisms change. Her body tightens and tenses. "I do. I watched back just to be sure. I listened really, really close. You asked Blake if he regretted anything..." Datura looks toward the ground.

"I have been--" she stops to claw at the right side of her face "trying to find it within myself to regret something. And I thought I found it. I regretted attacking you during your

tag-team match on Breakdown. Not for you. For Lyza. That was ill-timed on my part, and I should've waited." She sighs.

"In this moment? I wouldn't change a thing." Her head tilts upward, and that familiar blank stare.

"Because aren't after the same things they are, are we? We don't waste time chasing honor. It doesn't make us sick to blee. Kimberly. There is no honor in what we do." Elizabeth runs her tongue across her teeth. "You knew. I know you did. You knew I would not be capable of sitting by one second longer. You knew you had found my soft spot. My weakness. You got under my skin. You wore it like a blanket." She sneers.

"So congratulations. There is a short, short list of people in this industry who can lay claim to that. Not even Regan could burrow this deep. The problem is: Now, my dear, you're stuck. We can't have that."

"A lot of people pretend their angst makes them special. They stand in front of cameras and try to wax poetic about how they're darker, deadlier. They sound like me fives years ago:

They say they're the most violent member of the roster.
They say they'll stop and nothing.
They say they'd rather die than lose.

They stand in front of a camera and snarl and bark and tell us that they are mad, that they love hurting people. They try to convince us they are monsters, and they're not monsters, Kimberly. They're people: pathetic, sad people who think they're saying what they're supposed to. They're saying things that sound like us." She clicks her tongue.

"We're not like them. They're not like us. When we say we are going to do something, no matter how terrible it may be, we keep our promise because we don't need to make promises we cannot keep." Datura bites her lip and shakes her head. Her eyes glisten with excitement.

"Our brains don't work like theirs. And I say ours intentionally. Perhaps, at one point, you wondered whether or not you were the only one who operates like you do, who had the same... thoughts as you do. You thought you were alone. You're not alone, Kim. I am here with you."

"In another universe, we are bleeding the roster dry together while holding hands. We are skipping through a field in Denver, stapling faces and asses across the city. But in this timeline, in this life, we are twin spirits, conjoined. We are in a symbiotic relationship. I needed you to make me bleed. I needed someone to try to take this." Datura pauses to step off screen. She returns with the Undisputed Championship draped over her shoulder.

"The truth is, Kimberly. I don't find this fun... anymore." Her eyes flutter, and she looks down. "I do not have this drive to outclass my opponents in the ring that Lyza and Brando do. When I was in Girl Power Wrestling with Nina and Ryan and Salem, there was this urge to improve myself and try to master technique. I was trying to keep up. And I never could. And it took years of spinning my wheels and losing to realize what I should have known then: I'm not like these people, Kim. I'm not." Datura runs her right hand over her scalp.

"I will never be the most technical wrestler on this roster. I'll never be the fastest. I'll probably never beat David, as much as I would like to..." Datura waves her hands and walks off screen again. The scrape of a metal chair peaks the microphone as she moves it into the center of the shot. She plops down, visibly uncomfortable. "On the same night that Vengeance won their match after you stapled your way to victory, I was defending this belt for the very first time against Alioth Starre. It was the first time I used a piledriver in Supreme Championship Wrestling without getting suspended. I felt something every time I lifted him up and dropped him on his head. At that point I realized: I'm not supposed to chase any of these things. I am supposed to hurt people. I am supposed to break the rules." She presses her finger against her jaw and forces open her mouth. There is a loud crack. She grimaces and peers into the camera.

"For the first time since I won the World Title in Majestic Wrestling, I feel like I am finally where I should be. David and Bree can squabble over their World Championships. Xander and Regan and Glory and Shialo can fight over their titles. That's not where I belong. That's that's okay."

"Because this means everything to me.
Because this is my baby.
Because this is real." Her right leg begins to shake.

"And why do you want it, Kim? What are your big plans with my beacon of hope? You're going to change it. You're going to kill it. I can't let that happen." Datura shakes her head.

"It's one thing to want this because it is a symbol. That's the truth. Carrying the Undisputed Title means that you are the most violent, the most destructive, the most devious person in this entire company. Holding this means you can withstand the agony of failure and continue with blood in your teeth. Carrying this means that you did what others won't. This title means something.

People say things. I hear them. I'm not deaf, and I'm not stupid, Kim. I know that Knots and Sharper and everyone on Twitter look at this belt like a joke." Her teeth gnash together.

"I have spent months defending this against all challengers. All of them. If they even thought about trying to take this, I ended them. Because that's what We have to do. That's what I do when we are trying to prove we deserve to be here and I deserve to be here!" Her final words come out in a shriek. She stops, blinks, and stares ahead. For several moments, there is silence. Elizabeth sighs and slips forward, curled in on herself.

"Because I know. I know I'm not the most reliable member of this roster. I get hurt. I leave. I come back when I please. I lose. A lot. I couldn't get the job done with Bree and Jordan. I couldn't get the job done against Shilo Valiant. I couldn't get the job done against Regan Helms. I leave, I come back stronger,

and I lose again. I repeat this same sad cycle over and over and over. But this." She turns her head to look at her title.

"This is the first time in a long time where I did not fall back into my old habits. My old ways. This is evidence that I can do something different." Her neck cranes up.

"And there was a moment when I actually thought you would be a worthy person to carry on this legacy. I'm not laughing. I thought there would be no shame in losing this because you could possibly be the one to take the Unsanctioned Championship and make it recognized. Make it serious. When you threw that fireball, I thought we were the same.

"But there's a key difference. If I retain this title I will cherish it. I will protect it because it stands for something. But this is a joke to you too, isn't it? Isn't it?" Elizabeth throws herself to her feet, sending the chair crashing back.

"This is all a game to you. You don't care about me, and you don't care about this title. This is just a trinket for you to win and rename while playing your silly fucking games. I'm not going to let that happen." Her head shakes as she says this.

"I will not let this become the joke that everyone has made it out to be. You can staple my forehead. You can staple my ass. You can beat me into a bloody pulp with Wasley. But you better beat me to death. That is what it's going to take for you to win this Falls Count Anywhere match. Call me cliché, but I will not stop until I am physically incapable of moving." Elizabeth reaches up and grabs a handful of her hair.

"Because if I cannot defend this tomorrow, the most meaningful title I've ever held, against someone who doesn't take this seriously? I'd rather be dead."

--

1/23/21

The dim fluorescent bulb of the hotel hums against the sound of passing cars. Long after the camera crew has gone home. Datura

lays sprawled out in the bed, watching the fan blades in their permanent circle. Clothes lay randomly across the floor and furniture, empty bottles of beer litter the bathroom and tub, the ashtray on the balcony is overflowing. In the center of the dresser lay the Unsanctioned Title, pristine against a sea of junk.

Elizabeth sits up in bed and curls into a ball.

"It's not a joke. It's not a joke. It's not." She inhales deeply through her nostrils, which are obstructed by inflammation. She rubs at her eyes with the sleeve of her pajamas.

Datura spins and stands up from the bed before walking into the dark bathroom. The window sends streaks of streetlight through the room, lighting her from the back. She places some toothpaste on a toothbrush and looks up into the mirror.

"I deserve to be here.
Don't I?"

A muffled laugh track blares through the wall in the next room over.