



A History of Violence: Chapter Six

I became a three-time SCW United States Champion at the end of my match at Under Attack. I defeated Glory Braddock and Polly Playtime, regaining what I should've never lost by pinning Polly for the three. I celebrated despite being booed out of the arena in London, before making my way to my locker room in the back. There I sat, the title beside on the bench as I pressed my back against the cold steel of the lockers, and I exhaled, heavily.

I felt like my chest was going to explode before repairing itself and caving in, as I did so. One would think that I'd be happy that I became champion once again. One would think that I'd feel some sort of relief that the war against Glory had ended in my favor. One would think that I'd feel like I was on top of the fucking world once again, but that was so far from the truth. My mind wasn't on the match or the championship and what adding a third reign to my resume did to my career.

No, my mind was definitely elsewhere. It wasn't a single event. It felt like it was scattered, over a litany of situations I'd found myself in after welcoming Layton Abernathy into my goddamn locker room. After letting him introduce himself. After letting him fill my head with his reasoning to kill Talbot. After letting him talk me into meeting him and driving to Talbot's home. After letting him go in by himself. After watching him bleed out in Talbot's living room, as I stood on the outside looking in. After Talbot held me hostage, the barrel of his gun pressed into the back of my skull.

That's where my mind was.

And that's where it stayed. It was on my mind when I found myself holding you, my child, my daughter. You were named after my sister. I held you in my arms as I worked to get you back to sleep so your mother could rest. I knew I brought no sort of comfort, and I knew you could feel that. I knew you fed off it, because you continued to cry until your mother took you from me, leaving me to wander our house in the shadows. Leaving me to my thoughts.

Thoughts that continued to fill my brain with the conversation I had with Talbot, his gun cocked and ready to fire. Ready to splatter my brain matter all over his lawn, kept so pristine. Thoughts that followed me into my match against Polly's groupie, Colleen. Those thoughts kept me from sealing her fate and sending her packing with defeat. Those thoughts were still there after my team for the upcoming Trios tournament had been announced. And as we drew closer to the opening night of the tournament, those thoughts were still there.

My mind wasn't on teaming with Glory. Glory and I would work to outdo the other, undoubtedly. That became ingrained in my mind, but that was still swallowed up by the lasting thought of Talbot. I couldn't think about my other partner, Chance Owens, and despite coming off like a complete asshole, he showed promise. I didn't think I had it in me to tell him so. I didn't have it in me to think about getting together with them and trying to coordinate a plan of attack. I struggled to imagine the match as another war I'd hurl myself into headfirst.

All I could concentrate on was Talbot.

Not on the fact that I'd be standing across the ring from my protégé, and greatest student, James Evans on opening night. He and I had never crossed paths inside of the squared circle. He'd gone on and accomplished so much more than I could've ever imagined, and I'd be facing him for the first time ever. That wasn't on my mind. I wasn't even thinking about the fact that I'd finally be able to test my mettle against the anomaly known as Datura. She was coming off a hard-fought match where she lost the Adrenaline Championship to my old fuck buddy, Bree Lancaster. My mind wasn't there. It wasn't even on the fact that I had the chance to outdo Polly Playtime once again, as she stood on the opposing side as well.

No. It remained on Talbot.

I couldn't take my eyes from the scene in the living room. Layton's eyes were as wide as he could make them. His pupils were the size of quarters. His lips opened and closed at a rapid rate, as I watched the kid's body jerk and shake. Time seemed to slow down, and I wouldn't be able to tell you how much time slipped until Layton was nothing more than an empty vessel. If we had souls, I remember thinking, then his soul had exited his body.

I knew in those moments, as time seemed to return to normal, that I needed to get as far away from the house as I could. I knew I needed to run as fast as I could. I recalled how well I did during our morning runs during basic training. I needed to have that endurance back. I needed to be able to pick up speed like I'd been able to do in my twenties. But I couldn't move.

The desire was there, but nothing in my body decided to shift it in the opposite direction. I remained frozen. I was able to hear the night, noises from the city, and my breathing. When I felt the barrel dig into my skin, pressing itself against the base of my skull, my breathing became the only sound. I knew I'd be caught, and I knew Talbot was behind me. I recognized his snicker as the sound of the gun cocking interfered with my breathing, causing it to stop for a split second.

"Don't you fucking move," I heard him growl. "Your buddy thought he'd get one over on me. Motherfucker should've known that I'd have the best security system money could buy," he said, pressing the barrel in a little deeper, causing me to wince, as he continued, "Little did he know that I saw his punk ass creeping around here. He wasn't as slick as he thought he was. I let him pick the lock and step inside. I let him wander around a bit, before I put a bullet in him," and then, Talbot stood before me as the words exited his mouth.

The barrel then pressed into the center of my forehead. I could see Talbot had aged, but I could still see the Devil in his eyes. He embraced the violence as I had, but I could tell he loved every single minute that it coursed through his veins. He didn't go back and forth as I'd done for as long as I could remember. "Little shit ruined my fucking rug," he hissed, "and then, here you are, standing outside like some sort of coward. Were you going to sneak in and take me out if he fucked the mission up?" I said nothing, and he pressed the barrel tip deeper into my forehead, making it feel like it was tearing my skin, "I asked you a question."

I exhaled as I slowly lifted my hands up beside my head, maintaining eye contact before managing a response, "Do you remember me?"

Keeping the gun on me, I noticed Talbot squinting a bit, "Do I remember you? What kind of question is that? It doesn't matter if I do or not. You and your fuckhead of a friend had plans to kill me."

"Do you remember me?" I asked again, "Look into my eyes. Perhaps you'll recognize me."

"And if I do?"

"Maybe you'll lower your weapon..."

"I don't think I'll lower a goddamn thing," Talbot growled once again, "I've got you dead to rights. Do you know who I am? I bet you don't. If you did then you and that idiot bleeding all over my rug wouldn't be here. You would've spoken to God and the Almighty would've gladly clued you two in on how fucking stupid you were being in thinking you could kill me."

"Talbot..." I blurted out, "Your name is Talbot." I watched as he blinked rapidly. The gun eased up just a bit but not much. "You met me after 9/11. I worked underneath you."

"What's your fucking name?"

"Hudson," I replied, "Josh...Hudson..."

“Hudson?” he asked as the entire expression of Talbot’s face shifted. It appeared as if he’d seen a ghost. Lowering the gun, Talbot’s gaze met mine, “It is you...” he paused but only for a moment before that rage, that violence returned, and the gun was lifted once more, “What the fuck are you doing here?”

Keeping my hands up in surrender, not knowing what to do or how to react, I replied, “You already know what I’m doing here. You guessed correctly. I was here to help him just in case something went wrong. He’s not supposed to be dead,” I lowered my hands slowly as I spoke, “You are.”

“And yet here I stand, holding this,” Talbot motioned to the gun as he waved it around, “And then there’s you. Your buddy is dead. You could be next.”

“I could be?” I asked, “What’s stopping you?”

“I’ve not decided yet,” he motioned with the gun, pointing at the living room window, “Who the fuck is that? And why did he want to kill me?”

“He’s someone’s son.”

“Well, thanks for that Captain fucking Obvious.”

“His last name’s Abernathy. We knew his father. Cody,” I said, “Cody killed himself after coming home from the home.”

“And that’s somehow my fault?”

“The kid felt it was.”

Aiming the gun back at me, he asked, “How did he get you involved?”

“I’m a pro wrestler...”

“Yeah, I know,” Talbot fired back, the sarcasm rich in his words, “Fucking despicable. I taught you. Gave you a talent, and you wasted it on that bullshit.”

“That’s how he found me. I paid a visit to his home after his father died...”

“After his father took his own life like some sort of pussy...”

I sighed deeply, knowing the man had me at gunpoint, “His son stated his father killed himself because of what you made him do. He couldn’t live with it. Any of it.”

Talbot laughed instantly. His laughter was filled with mockery. It made me want to lunge at him, wrestle him to the ground before beating him to a pulp. Perhaps worse. But I did nothing. I remained still. I knew he was an expert with the gun. I knew because I’d seen what he could do with one. I knew because he made me better.

Talbot regained his composure finally, "Because of what I made him do? Do you have any idea what I made any of you do?"

"I'd like to think that I have an idea," I said, trying to remain calm.

He spit on the ground near my feet, shaking his head as he said, "You have no idea then, Hudson!" Talbot began to walk a circle around me as he continued, "All I ever had any of you do is survive. Through that you all learned the art of war, and make no mistake...war is art."

"I remember this well," I replied as I glanced at him over my shoulder, "Your words have been etched into my memory, like an illness I just can't shake." He finally stopped before me and I said, "It was that way for all of us. I'm the only one you pulled out of that hell hole," I stated, referencing Talbot's command center, "and you put me in another one, where you decided to tag along."

"What can I say?" Talbot shrugged, "you were my greatest student. The perfect soldier. You became so much more than what you were when you first arrived. I made sure of that, because I saw..."

I interjected, "My potential!"

He nodded, a grin spreading causing him to look like a child on Christmas morning, "Yes, you were listening all those years ago. I saw potential in all of you. What you decided to do with it once you were out from under my command..." Talbot shook his head once again, "Had absolutely nothing to do with me. Well, until tonight. When you decided to show up to my home to kill me," the gun was aimed at me once more.

I looked at the barrel of the gun, contemplating if my life would be over soon. I thought of your mother, and then I thought of you, my child. I thought of how I'd never get to watch you take your first steps. How I'd never be able to feed you baby food or play with you. How I wouldn't be able to watch you grow up and go to school, go off to college, making something of yourself.

In those moments, my mind shifted from you to how I should've gone inside with Layton. How I should've been the one with the gun. How I should've been the one to pull the trigger, ending Talbot as well as Layton's pain, even if it would've been temporary. That all went away however, as I watched Talbot lower his weapon, and our eyes met.

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked. I didn't know if there was a small part of him that wanted Talbot to pull the trigger, to end my own pain, to end the violence that lived inside. Violence I didn't want you to come to know as your brothers had.

"I'm not going to kill you, Hudson. As I said, you were the perfect soldier. My greatest creation. You're the reason I always felt like God."

"You're not God," I said, lowering my hands, telling myself that Talbot could've been playing mind games, trying to catch me off-guard. That it could turn into one of those kill or be killed situations he always placed me in.

"I beg to differ," he replied.

I shrugged, "You're allowed that right. We did fight for that freedom, didn't we?"

Cracking a grin, Talbot nodded, "Absolutely. Especially you and I. Think about what we did in that goddamn desert for the flag."

"I think about it. Every fucking day," I said. "I never want to, but it's always there. And I'm not talking about what you had me do to our prisoners."

He sighed, "You're referring to the mission. Aren't you?" I nodded, keeping my eyes locked with his, "I'm not sure why you're so upset about that. It showed you what I always saw in you, Hudson. You should be proud of what you did."

"I did what I had to do. You wouldn't have let me return home, otherwise," I fired back. "There's no need to leave that part out."

"Should I cue up the violin?"

"Fuck you!" I bellowed.

He lifted the gun, "Now, that's no way to talk to someone with a gun pointed at you. I'm sure we can agree on that. I know I said I wouldn't kill you, but I can always change my mind."

"Wouldn't be the first time."

"I want to let you go, Hudson. I want you to live. You've got your career, even if it is a waste of your gift for violence. I'm sure you've got a family. I don't want to take you away from all that."

"You know," I began, "I can't help but feel like there's a catch to all you're saying."

"And whatever your gut is telling you," Talbot said, "is right. There is a catch."

"And what might that be?"

Talbot glanced at the living room window, and I knew he'd refer to Layton as he said, "Well, based on what's happened here tonight, it seems that you're still in need of a mission. You're still in need of that violence. You want to use your gift..."

I cut him off again, "I'm already using my gift. Like you said...I've got a career."

"That's bullshit and we both know it!" he hissed.

“What do you want from me?”

“Well, you obviously remember our mission,” and what he said next shocked and surprised me. It was information that I never knew about. Information I wish I didn’t hear, but there it was, entering my ear, settling on my brain, and I knew that the longer Talbot spoke about it, there would be absolutely no way I could say no.

That night I walked away, doing what I knew I probably shouldn’t. I put my trust in Talbot. He told me he’d take care of everything. That he’d make it seem like I was never there at all.

I checked into the hotel I reserved to stay in while in Charlotte. I walked around downtown the following day before getting on another flight, where I reached New York. Where I came home to you and your mother. I spent time with the two of you, faking a smile, but my mind was still on that night. I could still see Layton’s lifeless eyes.

I cursed myself for being in that situation and even then, I cursed myself for trusting Talbot. I knew how corrupt he was. I carried that over to the arena, for Apocalypse, where I lost to Glory Braddock. That evening, while the rest of the Pay-Per-View continued, I sat in my locker room, without the title. I spoke with your mother, telling her that I was alright. I asked about you and she said you were sleeping. I told her I’d be home shortly. I prepared to grab a shower then a cab before coming home, but I was stopped by another phone call.

It was a private number, and when I saw that, I felt chills running up and down my spine.

“Hello?”

“Hudson?”

It was Talbot. I closed my eyes, squeezing them tightly before opening them slowly, hoping it was a dream. That I was waking up beside your mother, but I was still at the arena. It was my reality. A nightmare it didn’t seem I could get out of.

All because I met with Layton.

“Talbot.”

“How are we this evening?”

“I could be better,” I said, bringing up the loss to Glory as I didn’t want him to have any sense that it revolved around him, “I had a match tonight, and I lost.”

“Oh, well I’m sure you’ll bounce back,” he replied sarcastically, “Now, there’s no reason to get upset about anything tonight. We’ve got reason to celebrate.”

“We do?” I asked, knowing exactly what he was about to tell me. “And why’s that?”

"I found him, son."

My hand gripped my cell, squeezing it like I'd squeeze the life out of an opponent. I wanted to break it as I wanted the conversation to end, but I knew I'd still have ties to Talbot. There was no escape.

"You did?"

"Yes."

After a long pause, I finally spoke, "Now what?"

"We get together and orchestrate a plan of attack. Just like the old days."