The Long Road Ranch
Outside Reno, NV
9/30/26

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*The front door to Adam's house opens, and Austin McBride – the son of UPRISING GM Sean McBride – holds it open. Adam Hansen steps through it. He holds his bag on his side as he slowly crosses the threshold. His other arm is against his chest, held there by a sling. His cowboy hat is on top of the bag, in between the straps.*

Austin: Let me get that for you, Adam.

*Adam's head snaps towards Austin.*

Adam: I got it.

Austin: Just let me…

Adam: I said I *fuckin' got it*, Austin.

*Austin's hand jerks back, and his eyebrows raise.*

Austin: Yes, sir.

*Adam walks past Austin into the house. Martha comes up to him and reaches for the bag.*

Adam: Martha, my arm might be in a sling, but if you try'n take this bag from me, you're pullin' back a damn nub.

*Martha stops and slowly pulls her hand back.*

Martha: Well, okay then. Welcome home, I guess. Can I get you anything? Pepsi? Coffee? Rectal stick removal?

Sheila: Martha!

*A smirk crosses Adam's lips.*

Adam: Naw, she's got a point. I've been a right ass since I got to the airport. You'd think I'd be grinnin' ear to ear after putting Ozric down, but all I've been is madder than a woodpecker with a headache.

*Adam turns and looks at Austin.*

Adam: Sorry ‘bout how I talked to ya since ya picked me up at the airport.

Austin: It’s no problem, Adam. If you don’t need me, I should be getting over to the school for my training.

*Adam nods.*

Adam: Yeah, you git now. Go on.

*Austin heads out of the house and walks towards the bedroom he and Sheila share. Martha moves to follow him, but stays rooted to the spot.*

Adam: ***FUCK!***

*Sheila moves to stand, grabbing her cane, but Martha holds out her hand and moves to the bedroom. When she arrives, Adam is sitting on the bed, bag beside his feet. He is struggling with the shoulder sling.*

Martha: Need some help, or are you gonna treat me like shit some more?

*Adam drops his arms.*

Adam: Look, I said I was sorry, didn’t I? Would you help me? I want to get out of this shirt.

*Martha smiles, then walks over to him. She helps him get out of the sling, Adam wincing as she does. Kinesio tape is spread out across his shoulder, and you can see bruises all over his chest as she shirt comes off. Martha runs her hand over a couple of the bruises after she tosses the shirt into a nearby hamper.*

Martha: Geez, Adam, you went through hell again. First with Jace in the cage, and now with Ozric. Are you getting hazard pay for this?

*Adam lightly laughs.*

Adam: Naw, but bein’ in three companies, I have some excellent health insurance.

*Martha’s hand still lingers on his chest. Adam looks down and removes it with his good arm. Adam stands up and heads to the dresser. He opens the drawer and pulls out a sleeveless shirt. He pulls it over his head, taking a sharp breath. Martha shakes her head.*

Martha: Men.

*She walks over to Adam and helps him fully put it on.*

Adam: Look, they didn't say I had to keep that sling on all the time. They just wanted me to wear it mostly until I got home. They just want me to take it easy for the next few days. I'm supposed to check in with the UPRISIN' doc in a few days. So, I won't be goin' to the Ballroom tonight.

Martha: Well, don't you worry, Adam. I'll take care of you as much as you need.

*Martha puts her hand on his chest again and looks at him. She then leans up on her tiptoes and plants a kiss on his lips.*

Austin: Hey Adam, I… oh… sorry.

*Austin leaves the doorway as quickly as he entered. Adam pushes Martha away, wincing in pain a bit as he does.*

Adam: What the hell's your head at, woman? I am involved with your sister.

*Martha takes a couple of steps back.*

Martha: I… sorry. It was a mistake. It won't happen again.

*From the living room, Sheila calls out.*

Sheila: Everything okay back there?

*Adam grunts, exits the bedroom, and heads back to the living room.*

Adam: Yeah, just had trouble gettin' the sling off.

Sheila: What happened with Austin?  He didn't say anything and left as quickly as he arrived.

Adam: I snapped at him again. The pain is doin' weird things to me today.

*Adam sits down next to Sheila and kisses her.*

Adam: I missed you, babe. Corpus is beautiful. We should go there sometime. Just you and me. After you're all better.

Sheila: I'd like that.

*Martha is standing just outside the living room, in the hallway that leads to the bedrooms. She takes a deep breath, then walks into the living room, then through to the kitchen. She opens the fridge and pulls*

*out a 20oz bottle of Pepsi Zero. She brings it out and places it on the coaster on the coffee table in front of Adam. Martha and Adam exchange a glance.*

Martha: I am gonna go lie down. Let you two lovebirds catch up. I'll start working on dinner after I get up.

*Martha then exits the living room and heads to her bedroom.*

Adam: So, what are we watchin'?

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*Martha walks into the living room, having just started the dishwasher, and sits on the couch. Seated in the middle is Sheila. Adam sits on the opposite side of the couch. Austin is sitting in the recliner, not far from Adam. The two keep exchanging glances.*

Austin: Great dinner, Martha.

Martha: Thanks.

Sheila: Alright, Revolution is starting. Let me go ahead and cast this feed to the television so we all can watch.

*A moment later, Nessa Wall and Felicia Atherton appear on the screen, and UPRISING's Revolution 15 is on the air. As the show goes on, everything seems normal… until:*

**GRETCHEN DEVEREAUX**
Before we get into the business that lays before you, how is Serenity doing?

*Summer opens her mouth to answer and the picture suddenly tears sideways.*
*For less than a second, the entire broadcast disappears beneath a violent wash of digital static and cascading green code.*

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01010100 01001000 01000101 00100000
01010011 01011001 01010011
01010100 01000101 01001101
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00100000 01001001 01010011
00100000 01000100 01001111
01010111
01001110

// ~~SIGNAL... LOST~~ //

*The picture snaps back into place. Summer and Gretchen are exactly where we left them.*

Adam: What the hell was that?

Sheila: Could just be a hiccup with the feed.

*Adam nods, then they continue on. Everything is fine again through the next few matches and segments. During the Summer Page and Jeremiah Cross match:*

The arena suddenly seems quieter. Not silent. Just quieter than it should be. Cross looks toward the rope. Then toward Summer. Then somewhere beyond her. His hand stops reaching. Summer wrenches back harder. Cross refuses to submit. The referee checks him once. Twice. Cross's arm drops on the third.

**DING! DING! DING!**

**WINNER (VIA REFEREE STOPPAGE): "SPOILED" SUMMER PAGE**

*Summer releases immediately and rolls away, breathing hard. Her music hits. The crowd erupts. Everything's normal. Cross slowly pushes himself onto one elbow while Summer climbs the turnbuckles to celebrate. The camera begins to pull away. Then stops. For several seconds, the shot remains fixed on Jeremiah Cross. He isn't watching Summer. He's staring past her. Up into the darkened reaches of the Silver State Ballroom. Summer drops from the turnbuckles and exits the ring. Cross keeps staring. The broadcast cuts away.*

*Adam leans forward.*

Adam: Did y'all notice that?

Martha: Notice what?

*Adam shakes his head and sits back.*

Adam: Don't know. It just seemed weird there at the end.

*The show goes on, and the four of them continue watching. When John Patrick and Sean McBride share a moment backstage, Austin smiles brightly. His father and his godfather being together, knowing their complicated history, always makes him happier. Then the Country Strong versus John Patrick match begins.*

John begins to stir. Country sees it. And lets him. John gets to one knee. Country remains directly in front of him.

**COUNTRY STRONG**
John-boy! Hit me!

**JOHN PATRICK**
What?

**COUNTRY STRONG**
Hit. Me. John-boy.

John realizes what he's doing. His expression hardens. John suddenly grabs Country's wrist and pulls him forward. **VICIOUS END**! Country drops to one knee but doesn't fall. John maintains the wrist. A second **VICIOUS END**! Country finally collapses. Reluctantly, John covers.

ONE!
TWO!
THREE!

**WINNER (VIA PINFALL): JOHN PATRICK**

*John doesn't celebrate when the bell rings. He sits beside Country for several seconds, staring at his friend while Riven climbs onto the apron. John Patrick*

*won the match. Whether Country Strong just won something considerably more important remains unanswered. John rolls to the ropes to leave. But Country suddenly sits up. His eyes flash pure purple.*

**COUNTRY STRONG**
You may have won, Arbiter. But now I'm in charge. And I don't make mistakes...

*Country rolls out of the ring on the other side and disappears through the crowd. Riven stares at John, then at Country, unsure what to do.*

*Sheila's hand flies up to cover her mouth instantly. Adam stands up, wincing as he grabs at his shoulder.*

Sheila: Adam?

Adam: Y'know? John's been tellin' me somethin' ain't right with Michael. And I don't know what's goin' on. But maybe I need to be findin' out.

*Adam sits back down, and soon Will Ryder, Jana Rikar, and Lex Collins are on the screen following a commercial. Adam smiles as he watches his Regulator family, but pain flickers behind his eyes, knowing he can't be there for them tonight. The match goes on... Will and Jana successfully defend their titles against Trinity...*

*Will rolls onto his back while Jana slides inside beside him. The referee retrieves the Unity Championships and hands them over as Ryder and Rikar slowly rise. The champions raise their respective titles. The Silver State Ballroom explodes. The camera cuts to the audience. For the third time tonight, nobody quite comes into focus. Then the shot returns to the ring. Everything looks fine. The lights flicker and dim, then clapping fills the ballroom from every speaker and monitor. Country's face slowly appears on the jumbotron. His features are distorted and deranged. His hat and vest are tattered and dirtier than they were when he left the ring earlier. His eyes glow a vibrant purple.*

**THE FOREMAN**
Congratulations, indeed. I must say I wasn't expecting the weakest of the Regulators to put us so much of a fight.

*Country begins laughing curiously.*

**THE FOREMAN**

Ahh, the Werewolf looks confused. Don't worry, pretty little beast, I'm not concerned about you. But I am curious about you, Jana. Perhaps you could be valuable to my master after all. Even if that value is only to drive the spike of vengeance into the heart of the broken man…

*Country stares out from the screen for a moment. Then grins and lowers his head.*

**THE FOREMAN**

Leeeeeeex… Oh, Leeeeeeeex… I know you're listening… You call yourself broken, but I don't think you understand what the words mean.

*Country looks up, and his eyes are purple flames.*

**THE FOREMAN**

But I will teach you! I will tear you apart, starting with breaking every member of your little "Family". But who should I start with? Should I start with Jana? Or perhaps Adam? Hmm? Which would cause you more pain? Oh, I can't wait to find out… I'll be seeing you… I got work to do. And the work is never done…

*Country begins to laugh maniacally as the jumbotron fades back to normal and the lights return to full power, leaving Country's laughter echoing in the ballroom.*

Adam: The hell?

Sheila: What does he mean by breaking Lex's family, Adam? Honey, we *live* on his ranch.

Adam: Imma have to have a talk with him tomorrow, if he's around. Because I ain't sure what the hell's goin' on.

*The show culminates in Molly Hatchet being victorious over Anya Lebeaux…*

*Behind Molly, the Silver State Ballroom crowd becomes strangely indistinct again.*

*Faces bleed softly into one another. The picture struggles to focus. Molly doesn't notice. Neither does Mari. The image tears sideways. Once to the left. Twice to the right. Then the entire broadcast is swallowed by digital static that almost seems to explode from the screen.*

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**01001001 01010011**
**00100000**
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***// SIGNAL.... LOST //***

*For a fraction of a second, Molly and Marisol return though neither seems to have moved, like they're frozen in time. The picture tears again.*

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**01001001 01010011**
**00100000**
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*The static becomes deafening. The picture never returns.*

**[END TRANSMISSION.]**

*No one says anything as the show ends. They all can't take their eyes off the television. Adam suddenly shakes his head, then reaches for his phone. As we fade, we see him opening his text messages for Lex Collins.*

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