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The voices in my head and I would like to say that being away from this sport was horrendous. We would like to say that letting Gio win the SCW World title was a career ending move. That not giving two fucks of a damn when it came time to enter Taking Hold of the Flame wasn't the best idea. Maybe we should have given it the old college try. Heh. I remember the College Drop-Out from nearly two decades ago.

What was that story? Oh, right. My grandfather, yes good ol' Grandpa Henry died. I returned home. That led to getting kicked out of my family home, by my mom, mind you. I went back to school and got kicked out due to driving under the influence, resulting in my roommate being disfigured after crashing, bringing an end to a high-speed police chase. I was expelled and my roommate had a future as a janitor.

Another return home followed. I worked with my father, who in this head of mine, was a drug runner. A real kingpin. In reality, I brought that to wrestling. I had people use such a nickname against me. Does the name Masquerade ring a bell? Not much for me, either. The story lived on in my head, while my physical body was enduring the wars of the ring. I was sharing locker rooms with Ace and Chad. I was fucking Katelyn. I was fighting Warren James and Aaron Rupp. Beating David Helms and Shilo Valiant. Winning championships and amounting to nothing all at the same time.

What about the Second Coming? A play on words in a way, based on Chad's gimmick of 'God'. It was R for ridiculous. Or R for really stupid. With my cousin, I overcame EPIC but floundered in my love/hate relationship with this sport. More importantly, with SCW. I had stories in my head that played out like movies. Stories where I had taken over my father's drug business. What about the one where there was a voice in this head that wanted my sister? Christ. I need help, right?

It was just another failed experiment, much like myself. Each experiment, each story, had commonalities. Therapy. Mental illness. My greatest story involved Ace Marshall, Katelyn, and

Amy Chastaine. The voices in my head...well, we wanted to kill all three of them. I probably really wanted to murder Ace. I wanted to punish Katelyn. I wanted to have my way with Amy, but I'd gotten so bored with sex, that there was that animalistic part of me that wanted to add in torture with my sexual process.

I wanted to get inside Ace's head. I wanted to make him question everything, but Ace was like the majority of SCW. He no-sold my attacks, because he had to be cool and resilient. Amy and Kennedy, like every other female wrestler, just couldn't be weak. They had to talk tough. They thought they could truly overcome me. Amy and Kennedy, even Syren, couldn't possibly fathom that being away from the cameras and fans, away from the ring, they would've been in true danger. If I really wanted to harm them, I could've done so. I stopped myself from crossing lines I wouldn't have been able to come back from. I saved them. I've never asked for a 'thank you' and they should be thankful for that, too.

The SCW no-sold me as a monster, when I can be one. I could've been one even then. But no. Selena. Syren. Kennedy. Ace. Amy. They all saw me as weak. But they were totally fine with shoving the idea of Blitzkrieg being a monster because he was a bit bigger than me and had a bitching mask. Not to mention Aiken as his mouthpiece, and who could forget Aiken looking like a death metal artist from the UK, with that ridiculous get up, painted face included? There was New Eden and Blood Grove. Red Rayne was seen as a monster because she was a horror movie fan, I guess. Her promos seemed like they were written by a highly motivated Kevin Williamson in the nineties.

But me putting Ace through a barricade with a powerbomb off the top rope wasn't monstrous enough. Me basically murdering David Miller on live television before he did the same to himself before springing back to life, wasn't enough. Having the World title wasn't enough.

I tried to be the hero once again. I followed the path to redemption, using that as a name for my tag team with Angelica Jones. I conjured up stories in this head of mine, of working with struggling children. I found love with my wife. I had good relationships with Katelyn and our daughter, Kelly. I redeemed myself with Amy and Kennedy. I went to war with Gio then the Beauty Factory. I became World Champion again. I challenged authority. I injured Syren. But that wasn't enough, now was it?

No, not really. In the time since 2020, I've made Xander Valentine my bitch. I've made the Underground division, along with Kimberly Williams and Datura, matter. I come and go, disrupting the status quo of SCW because Syren doesn't do shit. Selena..., well just listen to her promos. She'll remind you of how awful she's made things. Xander isn't Xander. Hudson couldn't sustain any momentum. What else have I done? I made the House of James a threat in record time. I made Fall of Man legit just by showing up. I even won my third World Championship.

I lost the title. Aries pulled a Hudson and couldn't build off his win. Waylon has been reduced to a blubbing bitch. William can't get anything going. Xander and Selena are everything I said they were when I addressed the Executioner before I beat him yet again. Oh, and Cid Turner returned and became SCW Champion. Amelia is challenging him for the title and that is the state the SCW is in. So yeah, the voices in my head and I...we can't say being away was horrendous. No, not on a personal level.

I wasn't even upset that I missed Rise to Greatness. I've not been in a good enough position since I slaughtered the company's golden boy and took the strap. I mean, when Brittany Lohan has a better card spot on the biggest show of the year over me, then all of us can't help but wonder what the fuck. And maybe that makes me come off a little selfish, but so be it. That's me. It's not always me, but there are days. I mean, goddamn. I'm schizophrenic. That should tell me all I need to know about myself.

But now, I'm back. Am I in love with SCW? Or do I hate it? I guess it all depends on my mood. On my mindset. I've been so afraid of my mental illness that I've brought myself great harm in ignoring it. SCW can still be something beautiful, just like mental illness and its intricacies. And right now, I feel like I want to destroy something beautiful. That could change but right now, maybe I'm going to enjoy the ride. I'll ride the waves as they come. That is the thing with human nature. We don't know shit.

We are characters in the grand scheme of things. A gimmick in our own right. What stories will be conjured in my mind? Our mind? Who knows? But that's a constant, as well. I am a storyteller.

The unreliable narrator.

Sit back and enjoy the ride, James.

Embrace yourself.

Embrace the madness.

There's one thing Cain likes above all else, and that's custom-made clothing. The suit we share is made by our hand. Black on black, we enter the night. He's in the driver's seat, and I'm just along for the ride.

We share a brain, but Cain has his own singular tastes. Like all the voices do. Kismet enjoys looking at the stars with Braelynn. Abel enjoys reading. Learning. Chuck enjoys having a

nice glass of whiskey and a cigar. Heath enjoys watching footage of my opponents, honestly. Cain likes the violence. Sex. Anything physical.

Me?

I enjoy spending time with my children. And that excludes Kelly, because at this point, she's old enough to make her own decisions. She wants to stay with Katelyn. Godspeed is all I can say. But my boys, Sawyer and Brandon? They are my world. Unlike the House of Frost, I don't put my children into the wrestling world. Katelyn did that shit with the girls, and she had to beg and plead with me to not do what I wanted to do. Something similar occurred with her, the girls, and Chad. Xander was involved.

Those two pieces of human shit have paid in their own way, but my hand.

Our hand, I should say.

All this talk of 'our'? That has come from talking with yet another therapist. I can't even keep up at this point. I've had way too many. I don't even know if it's real if I'm being honest with myself.

What is fact?

Where does the fiction lie?

I am where it takes me.

But this therapist, a black woman named Dr. Janelle Morton, has told me time and time again to embrace who I am. To revel in what I am. And to include the voices. My voices. You got it. It is just what the doctor ordered.

Dr. Morton looks at me. She sits in front of her desk, while I sit on the leather couch across from her, my back pressed against it. Looking around, I don't remember how I got here. I just know I'm here.

"You don't need to see your condition as that. As a condition, or as a handicap," she says, calmly. She wears your typical business casual attire. Her hair is perfect, as it rests against the sides of her face.

"What should I look at it as, then?" I shrug, reinforcing the uncertainty behind my question. "I've had so many of you. Doctors. Therapists. I've been in the facilities. I've talked to a litany of experts. You all spew the same bullshit over and over and over again. And would you like to know what it all boils down to?"

She clears her throat and nods. "Please," Morton states, "enlighten me."

“None of you know what you’re doing. None of you know what you’re talking about. None of you,” I lean forward, bringing my hands together, interlocking the fingers, stopping myself from forming fists, “know how to treat me.”

“Maybe you just want...” she pauses, “maybe you just want a cure for something that cannot be cured. You’re receiving treatment but it’s not to your liking. Maybe your expectations are too high. So high that nobody can reach them, and even if they did, you’d raise the bar even more. You want a cure, but there isn’t one, James. You need to accept that.”

“You make it sound so easy,” I scoff, rolling my eyes in the process. “But with me.” I shake my head, “nothing is ever easy. Nothing is ever simple. Not even close.”

“You don’t want it to be,” Morton fires back.

I squint. “You don’t think so?” Cackling, I shake my head a second time. “What is it? Do you think that I want to be some sort of victim? To always be the victim?”

Her response cuts me to the bone. Her words are as cold as ice, just like the look in Morton’s eyes. “Yes.”

Trying to maintain my composure, I lean back in my seat, her words still slicing my skin. I exhale. “Why?”

“Because it allows you to continue asking questions. As long as you don’t have answers, you’ll have question after question about yourself. About your mind. What is that saying?” The doctor chuckles as she sits back. “Knowing is half the battle. Well,” she shrugs, “so is NOT knowing.”

“So, what do you suggest?”

“I’ll answer your question with a question. You want to know my suggestion. I ask you this. What do YOU think? Think of everything we’ve discussed here and tell me what you think my answer is.” She continues, without giving me a moment to think, or breathe. “Well, what do you think?”

Another exhale. A longer one this time. “Embrace. Accept.” We lock eyes and I nod. “Embrace. Accept.”

Cain is driving the rental car, cruising through the city. I don’t know where we are. All I know is that we’re in town for Breakdown that’s happening tomorrow. Cain wanted to come back. Fall of Man has fallen apart. We made sacrifices for them to grow stronger, and yet, Waylon couldn’t hold up. Aries faltered as he has always done. And as far as I know, they’re bringing in Ryan of all people.

“What’s going on?” I ask.

Our hands on the wheel, Cain is scanning the area we’re in. “I’m looking for something. For someone.”

“What? Who?” I ask. Remember how I said Cain had singular tastes?

“I guess I should’ve just stuck with the ‘someone’ aspect,” he replies, his focus remaining as sharp as his words.

“What was the ‘something’ you mentioned?”

“That’s already been taken care of. No need for you to worry about it until there’s something to worry about.”

Heh. Following the doctor’s orders. Embracing and accepting. All that has done is lead to the voices in my head having nothing short of an attitude.

The car turns to the right, going down a darker part of the city, and it doesn’t take long for me to fully grasp the concept of what’s going on. Of where we’re at. Women, all scantily clad, line up the sidewalks on both sides of the street.

“Why are we here?”

Cain snickers. “You should already know the answer to that. Didn’t you learn anything talking to Morton? Jesus fucking Christ.”

“I’m married, Cain. You know I have a wife. A family.”

“That’s all well and good,” he hisses. “I don’t have either of those. I wouldn’t dream of such things. I wouldn’t settle for such a normal life,” I can taste the disgust when he utters those words. “Just like you can, and get to, experience things...so can we. It’s only fair. We have to share the same body. The same brain.”

“And what do you have in mind? You can tell me, at least.” I say, hating the fact that I sound like I’m pleading. See how quickly I go from cocky to pathetic. I’m sure it has something to do with me losing control.

“Her,” he says, snapping me back into the conversation at hand.

I follow his gaze, and I see her, “The red head?”

“Yes.”

I'm sitting in the back seat of a car being driven by my grandpa Henry. Today was supposed to be a day with him, but the person driving isn't my grandpa. They look and sound similar. The person with his hands on the wheel scares me. I know I've seen a lot for an eleven-year-old, but there's something about this that just doesn't feel right.

It feels very, very wrong.

And to make matters worse, I'm not the only one scared.

There's someone else in the car with us. A girl. Well, she's an adult. About my mom's age. They look alike, too. Red hair. Same eyes. Same build. She works on the street in a neighborhood I've never seen before in my life. She and I have something in common. We don't want to be in this situation.

My grandfather said we were going on a hunting trip. And then, we ended up in that neighborhood. When asked, he said we were looking for a girl with red hair.

"Why?" I remember asking.

"They remind me of your mother," he stated. "Your mother had dyed her hair, going against rules I set in place. And what do we know about rules?"

"That you have to follow them," I say, gulping at the same time, "or you're punished."

"That's right!"

"Was my mother punished?"

"Well, she ended up with your father, living a life she never wanted. But we have you, at least. You're the best thing to come out of her life. But everything else...is her punishment."

The memory fades as I look at the red head in the passenger seat. I know my grandfather wants to punish her, because he was unable to do so with my mother due to her being pregnant with me and my twin brother, Abel.

Cain rubs our hands together. "I like to think of myself as a storyteller," he says. My thoughts become his words.

"What are you doing?" I ask.

Cain ignores me. The red head sits as close as she can to the passenger side door. Just like the woman in my grandpa's vehicle. Licking his lips, I watch and listen as Cain continues. "And there was this story in my head...gosh, I'd say fourteen years ago. Would you like to know what the story was?"

I can see how uneasy she is. Her voice breaks as the red head responds. "Yeah-yeah, sure. T-tell me."

"Are you scared?" he asks.

"Don't fucking toy with her," I shout from the 'Grey'. "You know that she is. You're feeding off this."

"We both are," Cain fires back at me, before returning his attention to the beauty across from us. "I asked you a question and for the money I'm paying you," I watch as he leans forward, wearing my body like a goddamn glove, "I expect an answer."

She shakes her head, clearing her throat. I know she's trying to look strong. To appear like she's in control. We have that in common. We have no real control. We have to embrace the lives we have.

"You don't scare me," she states. I want to admire her confidence, as fake as it is. "What was the story?"

"There was this woman...a sex worker such as yourself," Cain states, "and her name was Olive."

"And what was Olive's story?" she asks.

Cain's enticed and I can feel it consume my face and eyes. Our face. Our eyes. How lest I forget.

"She had a customer. He didn't want sex. All he wanted was to talk. And they talked," he continues, sighing. I remember this story. I know it never had an ending, and I can't help but feel Cain wants one. "And they fell for one another. Olive wanted out of the life she was in."

"And did this customer," she asks, I figure it's because she wants to keep his interest. I'm not sure if it's going to work in her favor, just as I'm not sure if there's anything I can do, "save her?"

Cain shakes his head. "No. No, he did not."

And there's the fear, I tell myself. I hear Cain cackle as the red head leans back into the door once again.

“Every single time,” my grandpa sighs, “every damned time I see someone like you,” he glances over at the girl next to him, “I get so sick to my stomach. I think of my daughter and how she allowed herself to become filth...just like you.”

I look at her and she looks down, shaking her head. I see her shoulders move up and down. She’s crying. I want to tell Henry to stop, but I can’t. I’m still afraid. I’ve no control.

“That’s what you are, isn’t it?” I hear him ask, Henry’s voice shaking me to my core. “Filth.”

“G-grandpa,” I manage to say, but I don’t think he can even hear me.

“Answer me!”

“What do you want from me?” she asks.

“I couldn’t punish my daughter,” Henry hisses. I feel my bones freeze as my blood runs cold, too. “I can punish you. I’ve punished many others like you. I have to.”

“No,” she shakes her head, tears streaming down her face. “No, you don’t.”

“Yes. Yes, I do.”

I want to tell him no, but the words won’t come. All I can do is watch, watching from the darkness. I want to hide, but there’s nowhere to go.

“Well, what happened to Olive?”

I tell Cain to stop, but my words fall on deaf ears. “She was killed, and then, this customer...” a soft chuckle escapes him, “he was going to become a hero. He was going to go after the man who killed her. Her pimp.”

Her voice breaks again. “He-he sounds like a real nice guy. Just like you are.”

“You think I’m a nice guy?” Cain asks. I want to tell her to shove the door open and fall to the ground. I want her to scramble to her feet, and I want her to run. To run as fast and as far as she can. “You think I’m a hero?”

I want to be a hero. “Let her go, Cain. Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

“You know we can’t do that,” he whispers to me. “We’ve gone too far. If we don’t go all the way, then you can wave goodbye to your career.”

My career?

“Yes,” Cain says. “Leave it to me.”

“Yeah, I think you’re a real nice guy,” she says.

“What do you say, James? Are we being a nice guy?”

I say nothing. There’s too much at stake.

I don’t even look at her. I’m unreliable, remember? As I did with my grandfather, I do nothing, except let nature take it’s course.