

"Sometimes it's a lot easier to fade away, than remain in a slow death."

DESPAIR

That's depressing…

"It's true though. I mean… Look at me."

EGO

You're a stallion, barely past your prime. What are you talking about?

"I'm sat at a booth at some knockoff ComicCon with literally fuck all in line."

FURY

They don't know who you are, they don't remember you. After all the years you put in, everything you gave up! You should be fucking angry!

"I'm bored more than anything."

He lets out a yawn as he pushes his back against the metal folding chair before slumping forward, his fist resting against the untamed stubble on his cheek. The convention hall is alive with sound but no voices around him, no people except the lost ones, wandering past the empty tables and pretending to search for something instead of giving him eye contact. He doesn't try to get their attention, he gave up trying a while ago.

BANTER

Jake, you remember having fun at least don't you? Being somewhat happy instead of a miserable sod? What the actual fuck happened to you, lad?

"I quit drugs."

ADDICTION

The fuck did you do that for, again?

DESPAIR

Probably because it was ruining his life?

EMPATHY

Made the people around him scared? Made himself feel hollow.

"Probably because it put all these voices in my head?"

META

And here's me thinking it was just you ripping off Disco Elysium or Deadpool again or the ***TEN-THOUSAND*** wrestlers doing this shit. Randy Orton's whole fucking deal was hearing voices in his head too! It said so in the song!

"Good to know my mental problems aren't unique. Everyone is ripping off someone nowadays anyway, nothing is fucking original anymore. People are just polite about it and call it "borrowing.""

BANTER

Look at Hollywood!

"Exactly. I'm borrowing psychosis."

RHETORIC

You keep telling yourself that, baby. Keep that perfect jawline held high and proud.

"I could do without my own psyche trying to gaslight me, thanks."

His phone pings a text and he digs into his jeans to retrieve it; a message from Holly asking him "Where the fuck are you?"

He seizes up, sucking air through his teeth at the moron he is. "You stupid cunt!" He sighs, pushing the phone back into his pocket and grabbing his jacket from the back of the chair before he rushes off.

LOGIC

If you leave right now and catch the train from Victoria back to Wigan you might get back in time for Holly to bludgeon you to death with one of those golf clubs you never picked back up.

"Great, when's the next train?"

LOGIC

No clue.

"I thought you were the smart one?"

LOGIC

I'm as smart as you and your cocaine-addled brain.

ADDICTION

Someone say coke!?

He half-runs out of the centre, an eye on his phone as he checks through train times.



He stops at the front door.

BANTER

...You gonna knock on it? You remember how doors work, right?

EMPATHY

Give him a minute. It never gets easier.

He closes his eyes tightly with a long, drawn out breath.

And throws his knuckles against the door.

FURY

I swear this bitch likes making us sweat. You should just leave, fuck her.

META

Oh yeah, great idea! I'm sure that won't haunt us in the near future.

DESPAIR

Ugh, I think I'm gonna be sick.

The door swings open and a woman with jet black hair and a mean scowl looks him up and down. He looks back, bags under his eyes. The slightest of smiles fold in the corner of his mouth.

The silence lingers far too long.

"So-"

"You're late. Again."

FURY

Cunt.

"I have better things to do than to wait around for you, Jake."

"Okay…"

"Okay?"

LOGIC

Bad choice of words there.

"Okay!? You don't fucking okay me! You sh-"

"Dad!"

"Oh thank God." He whispers under his breath before he kneels down to greet the kid.
"Ollie!"

He picks up the child in his arms and throws him up into the air before spinning around as the child giggles. Jacob smiles widely, trying to hide the hiss of pain from the twinged muscle in his back as he looks at Ollie.

"Wanna come the club with me?"

"Yeah! You gonna teach me how to box?

He ruffles his hair.

"Oh yeah, we'll crush some pre-workout and get you on the bags!"

ADDICTION

Bag!!?!

LOGIC

Not that kind you degenerate.

Jacob places Ollie down with a groan as he stands back up adjusting his back before looking back at Holly.

"Say bye to your mum."

Ollie rushes over and plants a kiss on his mother's cheek.

"Bye mum!"

"Bye sweetheart, have a fun weekend. Be good to your dad."

RHETORIC

Now would be a great time for a killer one-liner to leave on.

Ollie heads to the car as Jacob pulls the keys out of his pocket.

"See you Monday."

RHETORIC

Chef's kiss, old bean!

"Don't smoke in front of him. And Jake."

He stops turning to look at her.

"Try not to let him down this time."

Jacob stops in his tracks, his fist tightening before quickly unclenching and he gives a single nod before following Ollie down the path.

After an eventful drive of Ollie and Jacob singing loudly and poorly to whatever ear-wrenching song Ollie picked up from whichever movie he saw most recently. They pull up to an old church, simple and made of limestone with a small graveyard in the front. A sign

zip tied to the fence reading "Wrestling Youth Club" as the car pulls in down the long gravel road and heads to the back of the church.

Jacob stops the car and looks past the fence at a headstone. His hand trembles slightly which he catches and tenses his fingers one by one before taking out a pack of cigs and lighting one while opening the car door.

"Mum says you shouldn't smoke."

Ollie says from inside as Jacob rests his elbows on the roof of the car and pulls a long drag, expelling a plume of smoke that gets taken away by the wind.

"Your mum's right."

He drains the cig closer to the filter as he moves to the passenger's side and opens the door for Ollie who hops down onto the gravel.

"C'mon."

Jacob ushers Ollie inside and flicks half the cigarette past the fence and they enter the back of the church.

A large room with a tall ceiling and stained wooden floors, a lone boxing ring and sparse gym equipment. The light fills the room through a plain window filling a decorative arch. Their footsteps echo through as a large heavy-set man brushes.

"Jake."

He says turning up at him with a dour look before he spots Ollie and a smile sparks on his face.

"Hey kidda! How you doing?"

"I'm good, Dad's gonna show me how to box today!"

Jacob helps Ollie take off his coat as he runs across the floor and picks up the medicine ball with a serious amount of effort.

LOGIC

He's going to hurt himself doing that.

BANTER

Nah, he's tough. Look at him!

Ollie hurls the ball about a foot before running over and trying to pick it up again.

EGO

Strong kid, gonna grow up to be just like his dad.

DESPAIR

Hopefully not just like his dad.

Jake's smirk twitches watching him as he takes his jacket off and throws it on the ring apron. Tony approaches him and gets in his ear.

"Hey, Jake, can we speak in my office?"

"Yeah, sure." *Jacob looks at Ollie.* "I'll be back in a minute, alright?"

Ollie huffs rapidly.

"Kay!"

And keeps running around. As Tony nods over to the office and Jacob follows him; inside the room, a small collection of trophies and a worn desk. Letters pile up neatly beside the laptop, several brown letters accompanied with a red box highlighting the window Behind the chair where Tony sits; is a framed red and black mask that Jacob sneers at as he looks up at it.

"Jesus.. You framed it?"

Tony looks over his shoulder and chuckles.

"Well yeah, don't get many famous people 'round here. Piece of memorabilia, ain't it."

Jacob stands across from the desk with his arms folded.

"Wouldn't call me famous, mate."

His pupils dart down to him.

"What's up?"

Tony breathes a heavy sigh and taps his fingers along the desk.

"Council's closing the Youth Club."

There's a moment.

FURY

… Are we supposed to care? This was just community service anyway.

DESPAIR

Won't that mean we have to find community service elsewhere?

FURY

… Oh FUCK!

"Close it? The fuck you mean close it? It's a church, Tony!? How do you close a fucking church?"

Jacob unfurls his arms and places his palms flat on the desk.

"I mean, the church will still be here. They'll just use this space better I suppose."

Jacob pinches the bridge of his nose and rubs.

"W-why?"

He puts his hand down, turning it to Tony.

"I just got a letter mate, we rent the space and we're not making enough money for the bills."

"Renting it? I thought the priest or whoever was letting us use it."

"He is… But this place isn't technically part of the church.."

BANTER

That makes zero fucking sense.

"It's connected to the fucking church! What are you saying!?"

"Jeez, didn't think you'd get this heated about it."

"It's just…" *He composes himself with a sigh, running a palm down his face.* "I was gonna train up Ollie here when he was old enough, and… The kids need somewhere and something to do other than hanging outside Lidl and being little pricks."

RHETORIC

Nicely done! Top notch lying.

EMPATHY

Half-lie.

Tony rubs his brow.

"I'm sorry, Jake, it's out of my hands."

Jacob hangs his head with an annoyed growl before looking back up and seeing the mask staring back at him.

LOGIC

You are not thinking that, surely?

ADDICTION

What? What's he thinking?

DESPAIR

Oh please no.

He chews his lip.

His thumb going into his palm as he squeezes it.

His right foot tapping.

BANTER

Yes lad! Fucking go for it!

ADDICTION

Go for what!? What!?

"How much do you need?"

EGO

Oh my God, imagine the comeback! Imagine the run!

EMPATHY

Imagine how Holly would feel about this.

Tony swallows the lump in his throat with a sigh.

"It's six grand, Jake."

Jacob's brow falls as his eyes try to fixate on Tony's.

META

Signing bonus plus what? A few televised matches?

LOGIC

Jake, you can't just uproot and leave the country to wrestle again.

FURY

Of course he can! He can fuck this place off and be a millionaire again! Get that fame back! That shit that was stolen from him by some cunt and a broken condom.

"I can make us enough money."

ADDICTION

Oh shiiiiiit! He's gonna wrestle again!?

Tony looks at Jacob and back to the mask, a sigh comes from him.

"Jake, I appreciate the thought I really do… But… Do you think its a good idea seeing as last time-"

"I'll be fine."

Jacob cuts him off sharply.

LOGIC

It's pointless. You're doing this for community service! Just let the club close and find somewhere else.

EMPATHY

It's not just for that…

LOGIC

But what other reason- … Oh. Right.

Jacob clears his throat with a sharp sniff up.

"I-I wanna do something good for a change, maybe be someone Ollie can look up to."

"The kid loves ya no matter what, mate."

"For now, yeah." *Jacob looks out the door at Ollie playing, his hand trembles again at his side but he stops it by placing his other hand over it.* "But he's gonna get older and realise how much of a dick his dad was."

He turns back to Tony.

"I don't want Ollie to look at me the way I looked at my dad."

RHETORIC

Yes dear boy! Now that is taking centre stage!

Tony sighs with a nod.

"If you're sure… Thank you, Jake."

He stands up and takes down the frame and looks at it briefly before handing it over to Jacob.

There's a slight hesitation.

"Don't thank me."

But he finally clutches it, looking at the mask.

His face reflected over it in the glass.

"I'm not doing this for you."

Days later…

We sit in Jacob's flat, a scarce living room with an old couch and TV. The ashtray atop the coffee table is filled with ash and dead cigarettes beside an open laptop with tabs open on XWF and several on Dickie Watson. He throws his phone down on the table, the cracked screen showing a message from Vinnie Lane detailing flights, his first match back and crucially, his pay.

FURY

He used to be your best friend and he offers you that!? What fucking prick!

"It's enough."

He pulls another cigarette out and lights it, taking a drag before rubbing his palms into his eyes as. Stale smoke lingers in the air.

LOGIC

Considering how long it's been, I feel it's a fair offer.

BANTER

He could make more stacking shelves!! You mad?

EGO

We are NOT doing that!

ADDICTION

We could sell some weed? Start a little grow in here.

LOGIC

And how long would that take?

Jacob stands up toking on the cig and looking out of the window to the quiet street outside.

"I'm behind on child support as well… When am I done with this community service?"

LOGIC

30 days.

"Fuck me…"

He rubs his brow before opening the window and letting the cold air in. He sits on the windowsill looking up at the night sky.

EMPATHY

Since you're helping Tony out, he will probably just say you've been completing your service.

Jake nods to himself, chewing his lip.

DESPAIR

What if they stop you from leaving the country? Won't… Won't you get arrested?

EGO

Ask for a private jet!

RHETORIC

Beautiful idea! We'll charm Vincent like the good ol' days!

He scratches his head and flicks the filter out the window before closing it and sitting back down. He looks at a picture of him and Ollie on the end table beside him and his hand moves past it to the framed mask. Jacob inspects it briefly before turning it over and unclipping the bands. Taking out the mask and unfolding it in his hands. His callous fingers running over the material.

"... This is a bad idea, right?"

A mix of voices rattle his skull, some yes, some no. It's hard to make out which is which.

With a deep sigh he closes his eyes tightly and hooks the mask over his head and adjusts it.

Silence.

Pure and empty quiet.

For what feels like the first time in a long time.

Gator breathes in and out, almost meditating on the couch cushions.

He falls back into the couch, his body relaxes, his head falling back at the ceiling.

Another cigarette is placed into his mouth, pushing against the fabric of the mask.

He lights it and smoke slowly bellows out from the eyes and holes in the material as he hangs his mouth open letting it breath like fire.

"Been too long."

ADDICTION

Yeeeahhhh baby! I'm feeeeeeliiinng smooooooooooth!

Gator slumps forward, his chest first and his head lagging behind as he looks at the laptop in front of him.

"Dickie Watson?"

He sticks the cig in his mouth and pulls himself closer to the laptop, the screen blaring light into his mask.

"Why is this white kid the head of the Yakuza?"

META

Well… It started back in-

Gator whistles as he points a finger up, "Didn't ask you!"

His hands slowly go back down against the table.

"Good looking kid. Well-travelled. Lot of experience under his belt."

"Seems a bit… Limelight shy though."

"... He lost to Scoops McGee!?!! He's still alive!?"

LOGIC

Despite all odds. And thriving at the moment.

Gator scoffs a laugh.

“Holy shit! My dad wrestled him in Japan back in’t day… Hey, good on him!”

“So.” *He leans back in his seat, a leg crossing over the other as he continues to smoke, flicking ash onto the floor.* “Dick. From what I’ve gathered you’re a flirt.”

“By all accounts you should be in the main event, you’ve got the grit, the charisma, the tragic backstory but you can’t seem to fuck the prom queen? Just a fucking weeb living a high-school dream with the backing of the Yakuza and a pension to shit the bed when it’s time to lay down some pipe.”

“Premature ejaculation is an epidemic, Dickie, you are certainly the type to blow their load too soon.”

“You entered XWF for some one-off bullshit event and came back and bounced again and again until you won the Uni before losing it to the guy you stole it from. And that was your peak.”

“Now you’re playing wingman to Scoops McGee as he pops viagra and fucks your golden girl while you sit in the cuck chair and get his gatorade ready for round two.”

“Every single person had such high hopes for you, Dick!”

“You could’ve been ***THE*** guy!”

“Wasted potential.”

“Fucking killer.”

“Trust me, I know better than most.”

Gator stubs out the cigarette in the ashtray before standing to his feet and rolling his neck, a final puff of smoke exiting his lungs as he appears looser, at home in his body.

“I’m not gonna stand here and pretend I was the greatest wrestler who ever lived, I fucked up so many times it’s embarassing. We’re annoyingly alike, Dickie.”

“You blamed a human moment for not capitalizing when you should have.”

“I blame a part of me for putting a ceiling above us.”

“The fucking glass you can see through but never break past.”

He looks up, the white spaces above his eyes showing nothing with the blank expression of the mask. He slowly turns down to his bare feet, his toes curling on the burnt cig holes in the carpet.

"I came from an XWF that was disgusting."

"I came from the mud."

"This…" *He shakes his head,* "New place with the dogshit new logo and squeaky clean facade. Welcoming people like you with open arms and the promise to propel you makes me fucking sick. Building the company on pre-established has-beens instead of moulding them like they used to."

"You came from fancy lights at FIGHT and other bullshit, scaling buildings and beating legends."

"Getting pushed across the world."

"I grew up ugly."

"I was born into shit here and I crawled my way through."

"This isn't some lame veteran talk here, I'm not gonna play the scarred mentor saying he knows better or with age comes wisdom."

"I'm saying I'm going to beat the dogshit out of you."

"A fucking little prick who lucked into life, met a nice girl, plays the saviour, head of the Yakuza, former Universal Champion from a fluke win in a match with multiple people. A fucking nepobaby hanging out with Scoops McGee and some pop figurine for relevancy."

"A child handed victories and managed to do fuck all with the winnings."

"Just more crying."

"More nothing."

"The same shit spread thinly over a mediocre career where all the eyes were on you to fucking do something!"

"ANYTHING!"

"Every chance you got to prove yourself you fucked it up!"

"You're basically Diet Charlie Nickles."

"Except he has a title right now."

META

You just aged this promo like milk.

"Didn't I tell you to shut up?"

Gator heads over to the small fridge and looks inside.

"... You are kidding me?"

He pulls out a bottle of zero percent beer and turns it in his hands.

"Jesus, what happened to us?"

ADDICTION

I've been saying the same thing!

He twists the cap open and rolls up his mask to expose his mouth to drink.

BANTER

Maybe if you drink enough you could get the placebo effect?

"Or I could kill myself?"

DESPAIR

That was a joke, right?

He kicks the door closed and heads back to the couch grabbing another cigarette as he does.

"What a sad, sad life this man has had…" *He sparks up the cig and looks around the room.* "I assumed it was a joke on my end that we'd be in a Last Man Standing match, Dickie, I truly did."

"Me, beat up, drug addict, chain smoker."

"All bets are on you, and your spry twink body."

"I've been dealt a shit hand."

"A whole lotta threes and sevens."

"But I'm willing to go all in."

"Becuase I've got nothing to lose."

“Against the kid who had it all.”

“The “rookie.””

“The “underdog.””

“The plucky fighter willing to risk everything to prove themselves.”

“But those monikers were plastered onto you when you first started, when you were those things.”

“Now you’re here.”

“And you’re stuck.”

“A foot trapped in the mud not knowing whether you should climb through the shit and reach the top of the mountain or sink deeper and dive into the water.”

“Be the big fish in a little pond battling off Blades, Hixxes, Klines and Grangers to keep afloat in relevancy.”

“The former X Champ.”

“The former Uni Champ.”

“The sole survivor.”

“Looking up at his peak from the place he’s in now.”

Gator takes another swig and toke.

“While I’ve been here.”

“Just under the surface waiting for a chance to sink my teeth into something.”

“And, Dickie, I am hungry.”

“You’ve been through shit, I’m sure. But it’s kid shit. It’s playing around in Japan, it’s searching old churches like Scooby-Doo, it’s hiding in Legoland from the police. It’s fun! I did the same shit.”

“But life hit me like a fucking truck, man.”

“And somehow, some way, I am still standing here.”

“And I will remain until everything else around me is ash.”

“I am weathered stone.”

“I am timeless.”

“My name will be remembered longer than yours and my mark will be here after you are forgotten.”

“Because even if I am a washed-up junkie with a wasted career.”

“I’m still a fucking legend here.”

A long drawn-out inhale of the cigarette burns it down to the filters and he kills the embers in between his fingers.

“I want you to know.”

“After I shove your face in the dirt, remind you of your failures. Put you in your place like the fucking midcarder you were born to be since you don’t have the heart to except the gifts given to you and take the top spot here, while I can move on to make more money and restore my legacy, to climb that mountain your reluctant to scale.”

“It’s nothing personal.”

“I simply just don’t share that humanity that makes you weak.”

He finishes the bottle.

Placing down on the table in front of him and his fingers hook underneath his mask.

But then stops as he lifts ever so gently.

Sitting in the room still for a moment he looks to the window, the clouds covering the sky. Passing past the moon.

And looks at his wallet.

His fingers, ever so slowly, turn the mask back down.

And he grabs the wallet.

And exits.

A bead of water dripping down the empty bottle as the door slams shut.