



“So, you said all that shit to her, and she didn’t laugh at you?” **Stetson asked Hudson, after he described his conversation with Sasha Drachewych.**

Hudson shook his head, “No, she didn’t. She said she’d see what she could do.”

“And what she could do turned out to be a fucking title match? Like right out of the gate. Are you sure you’re not sleeping with her?”

Hudson scoffed, “You know I’m with Erica, and if there was anyone else outside of her that I’d sleep with,” **he grinned,** “You know it’d be your mom.”

“She’s near death, you asshole.”

Hudson shrugged, “Well, that’s probably because it’s been quite awhile since we knocked boots.” **He sighed,** “You know that’ll never get old. We’ve been throwing those jabs since high school.” **Hudson knew he was right. When his own mind had broken down thanks to the work Dr. Vaughn had been forced to do to people, Hudson targeted Stetson, using his ex-girlfriend, Amber as bait, in order to play games with Stetson’s mentality.**

They came together once again, after Hudson had gotten help and sorted his brain out. It took time, but their bond had grown and become stronger than ever before. “Yeah, yeah,” Stetson said, flipping Hudson the bird which had become customary between them, “Are you ready for your meeting with the suits today?”

He shrugged once more, wishing his friend hadn’t already agreed to such a meeting. Hudson looked at the four men sitting near the ring, as walk-ins for the open house. His

gaze returned to that of Stetson, “I guess I don’t have much choice if we’re being honest. But I will be respectful, as long as they are, too. I think that’s one of the laws of the jungle if I remember correctly.”

The suits Stetson referred to, were a man and woman team, composed of so-called ‘sports entertainment’ fans Eliza Reese and Dillion Buchanan. They were interested in the House of Hudson training facility, as well as the promotion Hudson had given man-birth to, Iron-Fist Wrestling. They wanted to acquire the name and back it, from what Hudson had gathered.

“Well, make sure you remember that. And be sure to actually listen and to actually give a damn about anything and everything they say,” **Stetson stated,** “Working with them could prove to be beneficial, which I may or may not have already said.”

“You’ve made it abundantly clear.”

His friend then motioned over to the four near the ring, “So, what do you think about these guys? They’re not what we typically go for.”

Hudson shrugged as he looked in their direction once again, “You’re right, but I think they could be good workers. That’s what I’m telling myself anyways,” **he stated, as he studied each individual. A beer drinking redneck. Two men who clearly loved to eat, and one guy who had actually competed and won in the SCW in his first match, a battle royal, nonetheless.** “I guess we’ll see how dedicated they are, based on how long they stay.”

“You’re going to make them wait?” **Stetson asked.**

Hudson nodded, “Yeah. Patience is a key virtue in getting better in the ring. If they stick around, they can consider this lesson number one.”

“Well,” **Stetson said with a sigh of uncertainty as far as Hudson sensed,** “If you roll with these guys, all I can say is that you sure know how to pick them. You know basically what I’ve said about most, if not all, the women you’ve dated. Or married for that matter.”

“And the same could be said about you.”

“But this isn’t about me.”

“Of course not.”

“No, I’m serious. Dillan and Eliza are here,” **Stetson said, pointing toward the main entrance.** **Hudson sighed, knowing that duty called,** “Go make us proud,” **his friend said with a pat on the back. Hudson walked past the four potential members, telling them he’d be with them as soon as he could, before making his way toward the suits.**

“Good morning, Mr. Hudson,” **Dillon said, extending his hand, which Hudson took and shook.**

“Morning to you, as well.”

Eliza grinned as they shook hands, too. “It sounds like you kept your North Carolinian accent. I sense a bit of a country twang.”

Hudson grinned, “Yeah, it comes out more and more, the older I get.” **He then looked around the gym, before locking eyes with them,** “So, what can I do for you two today? As you can see, I’ve started an open house with the gym, and I’ve got a few guys waiting for me.”

“Then we can get down to business, which is exactly why we’re here. We want to help expand the House of Hudson gym, just as we want to take over the IFW. We know business has been down since you shut down IFW operations. Not to mention your injuries over the last year,”
Dillon stated.

“I see.” **Hudson replied.**

Eliza chimed in, “With the IFW, we know that you, as well as your investors, lost quite a chunk of change. That is money we could get back for you. All of you,” **she said sternly,** “And as far as you’re concerned, we’re interested in you as a performer, too,” **her statement bold as it caught Hudson by surprise. Stetson hadn’t mentioned anything of the sort.**

“What do you mean?” **Hudson asked, trying to hide his confusion.**

“Well, you’re in the SCW. One of the biggest promotions and leading names in sports entertainment. But, if that doesn’t pan out, there’s a promotion that is based out of Georgia, which isn’t far from home,” **Dillon said,** “And not to mention one in Connecticut, which isn’t far from here, either.”

“SCW is my home,” **Hudson said.**

Dillon shrugged, “We’re just pointing out the options. Those two, plus a few other American promotions have been in contact with us about potential athletes we’d invest in. You’d be one of our top ranked clients, Mr. Hudson, and should you find yourself dissatisfied with the SCW, we,” he said pointing to himself as well as Eliza, “could find you a new home.”

“And how would you get my money back for the IFW? How would that boost membership business in my gym?” **Hudson asked, keeping the conversation going as his confusion remained.**

Eliza nodded, “Right. Well, we...as in the company we represent...would back the IFW. You know, get things going again. You could be a partner and have a say in creative. We rebuild the IFW, make it into something it didn’t get the chance to be, and people would flock to shows. Fans are always looking for another promotion. You’re a banner name. A legend in the

business. That means there'd be interest. And that interest would serve the gym because people would want to be trained by you. They'd be of the mindset that you'd give them their big break in the IFW."

Dillon grinned, "We ran the potential numbers and things look solid."

Hudson paused for a few moments. He knew getting Jordan's money back would get him back into her good graces, possibly. And not only that, but Hudson also loved the idea of giving young wrestlers their chance when places like the SCW couldn't or wouldn't. Yet, there was something that didn't sit right with him, in his gut, which he always followed.

"Well, I appreciate all the things you've said about me, just as I appreciate your ideas," **Hudson said with a sigh, before extending his hand.**

Dillon replied, "You're not interested, is that right?"

Hudson shook his head, "Those words never left my mouth."

"They don't need to."

He grinned, "Well Dillon, there's a saying where I'm from. You can't count your chickens before they hatch, and right now, I'm not about to sell my soul after one measly meeting."

"I really think you need to consider all that we're saying. You can truly become your own brand, Mr. Hudson. The IFW could become the new leader in sports entertainment. Or wrestling, since that seems to be more up your alley," **Eliza spoke up.**

Hudson smirked, knowing that while he was intrigued by what they were selling, he wasn't ready to buy just yet, "That is all well and good. Everything you've said has grabbed my attention, but I think such matters need more than one discussion before an agreement can be found," **he replied,** "Now, if you feel you've wasted your time, then you need to take a lesson out of the book I teach students here..."

Dillon cut him off, "Looks like you only have four here, but please continue."

Hudson held his tongue for a few moments, trying to keep Dillon from getting under his skin. He exhaled lightly, "And you said you could increase those numbers more or less. I still need time to think and more discussions to be had before I sign away everything I care for." **He heard footsteps approaching, and Hudson turned to find Stetson making his way towards them,** "Ah, Stetson. I'm sure you know Dillon and Eliza."

"Yes of course," **he responded,** "How are you things going over here?"

"We were just leaving," **Dillon said as he fixed his suit jacket, and walked away, not hiding his disappointment at all.**

“Yes, Mr. Hudson. Stetson,” **Eliza said**, “We’ll be in touch so we can have more discussions as you seem to prefer.”

“That I do,” **Hudson replied, his country twang, as she put it, coming out in his delivery. He watched as they made their exit from the gym, before turning his attention to Stetson,**
“Did you know they were a couple of pricks?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, did you not notice how much of a brat Dillon was acting like? He reminded me of Katie Steward in that regard. And Eliza came off crazy like Sienna Swann. She’s just a little quieter than Sienna was, and probably still is.”

“Okay, so what was the issue?”

“Are you telling me you didn’t know they wanted to build my brand? What am I? Some sort of fucking politician?”

“I mean, I’m not seeing the issue,” **Stetson said, crossing his arms over his chest, confusion building in his eyes and face.**

Hudson shrugged, “Well, like I said. I want to have a few more chats about it before I agree to any damn thing. What they were saying held my interest, but it all seemed a little too good to be true. And that’s the case more often than not.”

“You have a real problem trusting people, Josh. Do you know that?”

“I can’t argue that, but it’s not like I’ve never NOT had good reason in that regard,” **Hudson said with a nod**, “But those two will be back, I’m sure. They seem pretty dead set on working with me. Maybe we can, but in time. That’s the future. I need to focus on the present.”

“And what’s the present?”

“I’ve got a shot at the SCW Television title. I’ve not been in the ring for three months. Autumn Valentine is no slouch whatsoever. Hell, she’s probably a bit more creative than me, not only in the ring. Personality wise, too.”

“Well, if we’re being honest,” **Stetson began**, “You’ve never been one for personality. What you see is what you get with you.”

“I think that’s why I’ve chosen to work with those four over there,” **he stated, motioning toward the potential students with his head**, “They all seem to bring something different to the table. And when I gave Sasha ‘what for’, I immediately felt that I needed to bring something different.”

“Different how?”

“When I first won the SCW World title, I felt content in knowing that I was something different than all the names that had been force fed to the fans in terms of the main event level. I prided myself on that. But now I’m still just Josh Hudson. I’ve not evolved. I’ve not changed my approach. It’s one of those ‘if it’s not broken, don’t fix it’ sort of scenarios, but there’s that part of me that believes something does need to change. And these guys could be the key.”

“What makes you think that?”

Hudson pointed toward them, “This guy...Vihaan he told me his name was, he seems eager to become a wrestler. I’ve been a wrestler, and while my hunger is there, there’s that fear of being content. And the other guy, Brody McCoy, despite his love for PBR, seems to be having fun when he’s in the ring. Based on his brief run in Emerge, at least. I’m all business in the ring, but I find myself asking...what’s wrong with having fun? And the other two...Derek Adonis and Ryu Iwaza love to eat as far as I can. Derek told me that God had blessed me for agreeing to look at him as a potential student, and Ryu seems to have quite the vicious streak that most big men seem to only talk about.”

“Derek, all in all, seems to have faith in himself. I know I can go, but I don’t always have faith in my abilities to carry me to victory, to carry me to success. I could learn from them, just as they can learn from me. We could all better one another. They’re all different and unique in their own ways.”

“But you’re a wrestling machine. You get into the ring and you dominate.”

“Not like I used to. I’ve seen matches from all these guys before, and no matter the result, they don’t change their tune. They get right back up and go at it again. I can’t really say the same for myself. I’ve spent more time dwelling on failure than appreciating my successes.”

“You sure you really want to do this? What if things don’t need to be fixed?”

“There’s only one way to find out, and I guess that’ll start today.”

“Today?”

“Yeah. Let’s go meet the guys,” **Hudson said, motioning for Stetson to follow, which he did. They quickly found themselves in front of all four. Hudson noticed the closer he’d gotten, that Vihaan was looking at pictures of hot women and fast cars. Brody was enjoying his fifth PBR. Hudson hoped so, at least. Ryu was eating a Snickers which he probably pulled from his fanny pack. Derek was reading Scripture it seemed.**

Hudson spoke, getting their attention. “Alright, guys. I’m sorry you keep you waiting. It’s been a busy day but I’m good to train with you. The way I see it, I can help make you guys better, and you can do the same for me. At the end of the day however, it’s up to all of you. Are you in?”

“Goddamn right!” **Brody said.**

"Blasphemy!" Derek cried, leaving Hudson wondering if that was a yes, or something else entirely. All he could do, he thought, was hope for the best,

Shoot

"Alright stop," Josh Hudson said, putting a hand up near the camera lens, before using the same hand to point at the center of his chest, "I've got something to get off my chest. Something I feel is very, very important. And it's really coming from the heart."

"I'm not the masked man who attacked Lexy Corp," he said with a sigh, looking somewhat relieved before Hudson continued, "Phew. I'm glad I could really get that out there. I don't want there to be any further conspiracy theories running rampant. If they stick to Blake Mason, then so be it. I just wanted to go ahead and clear my name before it was ran through the mud."

"Now that that's out of the way, let's just say that it's good to be back. And yeah, I'm back. I'm not here to come and go as I please. I'm here to wrestle every week. I'm here to face the best and to beat the goddamn best that this company has to offer," Hudson's tone began to switch from slightly cheerful and sarcastic, to far more serious and somber, as he continued, "And winning the SCW Television Championship for a second time would be the perfect start to begin the climb back to my throne. And yeah, it's not like me to state such a claim, but I've always felt I was a king here. And not some Snow King or anything of that nature. I'm a warrior. You can view me as a warrior king, because I'm the type to get down in the dirt, put in the work, win or lose."

"So before Lexy and Autumn decide to say that I've not beaten anyone to get a title shot, they need to realize that I didn't lose a match before I got attacked and injured at Taking Hold of the Flame. I guess records do count for something here and there, in SCW," he quipped, his tone remaining the same, "I know Purity Pixie defeated Katie Steward which is a high honor, and I'm not downplaying it. Winning four or five matches in a row is a high honor as well, based on how highly competitive the SCW continues to be. So yeah, I earned my shot, and it's not based upon my namesake. That's not my style. Never has been, and I'm not about to start now," Hudson stated as he recalled how he fought against such a thing at various points in his career. See: Xander Valentine. See: CHBK. "I'm just trying to stop you from spinning a bullshit narrative. You know...save your breath. You'll need it because I'm not sure if you've ever noticed, despite any losses I had handed to me against your former cohorts like Syren or Christy Matthews, because just as it was then, it is now, and that I'm still a wrestling machine." Knowing it was a statement that some may not buy, Hudson didn't care. He meant each word, as he always had.

He shrugged and shook his head, "Now, I'm not deaf, blind, or dumb. I know people, probably even Autumn Valentine, who will give me my fair share of respect, think that I'm a little too beat up. I'm getting a little too old to continue doing this. But you see," Hudson feigns shuddering, "I feel like I'm still in my prime. I've no problem doing what I've always done. Answering all

questions and silencing all doubt. And I can't think of any better way to do just that, to show that I can still go, and be the best damn wrestler in the world today, than by facing someone of the caliber of Autumn Valentine," **He cleared his throat, thinking about the young and hungry superstars he'd faced before. Names like Alexis Quinne, Kandis, Minvera crossed his mind,** "When I look at her, I can't ignore the fact that I see hunger. I see desire, and I know, deep down in my heart of hearts, that I'm going to have to stomp it out for one night."

"And I know stomping it out means having to stomp out Lexy Chapel. I know how much of a role she played in your match last week, Autumn. Pixie brought you a fight that you didn't seem to expect. Lexy got involved, not once but twice," **Hudson growled,** "And I've no doubt in my mind that she will try to do the same when we lock up at Breakdown. I'm not stupid. I've been doing this for 26 years. I've learned enough tricks of the trade, to realize that one needs eyes in the back of their head. I have those. What I don't have, now that Pat Evans is gone and the old boss himself is gone, are friends. I've never been one to operate that way, other than with Regan Street and Sienna Swann, and we all saw the terrible way that all ended. You have Lexy. You have Ace, a man I recruited 12 years ago. That makes you dangerous, but in the same breath," **he said, sounding more focused with each passing statement,** "You're putting my back against the wall. Not only with your talent and skill set, but with the numbers game. It's a thing everyone seems to surround themselves with. Numbers. Taking on all comers and telling fear or worry to piss off, makes me as dangerous as ever."

"I mentioned that I'm a warrior, and that stands true. I will take the bumps and bruises. I will shed blood and sweat. But I'm not going to cry. I will dismantle you all and subtract from those numbers if I'm pushed to that point. And I have absolutely no qualms with making you scream in agony and beg for mercy at Breakdown, as I push you to the brink of tapping out or going to sleep. Either way, you're looking at the new Television Champion," **Hudson glared at the camera for a few moments, before pulling back and away as it all faded to black.**