Prologue | Merigag
On the record promo

The real question is... Did they put me up against this talentless hack to teach him a lesson, or to teach me one?

Honestly, I'm starting to wonder where they dig up these characters. I thought Reggie Estrada was over the top, I thought Charlie Nickles was the walking definition of CTE - and now they throw me into the ring with this Marigold guy.

Jesus H. Christ...

I am uncertain about how to approach this situation in its entirety. The promo, the match, the technique - *all of it seems perplexing*. How does one adequately prepare to face an opponent who appears unaware of his surroundings? Moreover, is it ethical or even legal to place such an individual in this position?

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that the XWF threw this guy into the match because they believe I'm the only one capable of getting a decent 'match' out of this bozo. That's like asking me to wrestle a broomstick - honestly, the broomstick would be a less self-destructive and far more ethical opponent.

Just look at him; he's about as sharp as a cucumber... with **Alzheimer's**.

And **Thad... Teddy...** *Homeboy*. I know you don't run every little thing here in the XWF, and that this is likely something you've got a person for. But c'mon, bro... You can't tell me that this guy has passed a drug test at any point since the mid-90s. I can smell the alcohol on his breath when I watch him talk on television! And you want me to get into the ring with this reckless hack!?

-grumble-

Alright, fine... Look, I get it. *My consistency has been as reliable as a weather forecast*, and my record here is less "champion" and more "participant." *The Ides?* **Total disaster.** Unstoppable? Sure, if you mean I'm great at stopping myself from succeeding. Honestly, I don't have the clout to demand better opponents - not until I achieve something more impressive than being a walking disappointment.

Take what they give you and all...
BUT COME ON MAN!

The 'kids' backstage tease me for being 42... Meanwhile, this guy is in his 50s - *and like, a rough-life kind of 50s*... While I stick to a strict diet and disciplined routine to stay fit and as youthful as possible, Frankie's version of fitness involves keg stands and snorting Adderall off a back room sink.

I look like I'm 32 years old - this guy looks like he's been chain-smoking unfiltered cigarettes and using the gutter as his pillow. And the smell... Oh, the smell! That's the real challenge here. It's not just me versus Marigoon in Fenway - it's me versus Marigoon **[and]** his weaponized body odor.

gag.

The more I think about it... the more it feels like some devious plot to punish me for my inconsistency. And clearly, you're counting on the Boston crowd, with their love for alcohol and aggression, to enjoy watching me squirm in the spotlight.

Look, Boston... Don't hate on me, I'm an Expos fan, not a Blue Jays fan
We're not enemies here!

siiiigh

Why am I even ranting about this? There's no changing it now. My only recourse is to either no-show the match and look like a little bitch, or suck it up and fight this talentless nitwit. And we all know that I'm never going to no-show a match - no matter how degrading it seems.

Wait, I take that back.... I'd vanish from this roster like a magician in debt if I were ever booked in any Attitude Era-style women's matches. (*Bra and panties, mud pit, evening gown, you name it*...) But this is the XWF, where that kind of nonsense gets dropkicked out the door faster than Fances Marigold's sobriety.

So, rest assured - I'd never back down from an XWF match, ideal or not.

Anyway... I'm getting sidetracked here. Rebellion, outside at Fenway Park in historic Boston, Mass... The baseball stadium they sold Babe Ruth to help finance, and the home of so many historic moments. For Frances, his night is going to feel like Bucky Dent or Aaron Boone's home run. And for me, it's going to be like 2004 all over again...

Like the Red Sox in 2004... I'm going out there to break a curse and build a dynasty. One jabroni at a time...

ACT ONE | Perspectives
OFF Camera

"Unremarkable, frustrating, forgettable... That's pretty much how I'd describe my XWF journey so far. I get it - building a legacy takes time, but it feels like time has been working against me these past two years. Kind of like my love life - either blazing hot or freezing cold, with no middle ground."

Tatiana sat on the sofa, lost in thought, facing her sports psychologist. These bi-monthly sessions always seemed to cover the same ground—something she couldn't seem to shake. The pressure to break through the glass ceiling, to surpass her expectations, and to deliver for her fans... *while she still had any left*.

It consumed her completely, haunting her thoughts and fueling her obsession.

"Has the little break done anything to help you clear your head after the last match?"

Her gaze lifted, a quirk, a frown...

"Not really... Another stab at the TV Title, another swing and miss... Seems fitting I'm about to wrestle in a ballpark. Except I feel more like the White Sox instead of the Red Sox."

"Wrestling, much like baseball, is a grueling season with many opponents. You have the caustic character fault of feeling like you have to win every match to reach the pennant."

Did she just throw a baseball reference back at me? Damnit, I want to be mad about that - but she's got me dead to rights with a 0-2 pitch count.

"Well, I'm going to need one hell of a hot streak to even think about the championship. Even Jim Mora is flabbergasted at the idea of getting to the playoffs."

PLAYOFFS!? I hope we can just win a game!

"Okay, you got me on that reference... I don't know who that is."

"Eh, he's a football coach, and we're using baseball analogies. It wouldn't have hit the mark even if you knew the reference."

*The question I **should** be asking is whether or not I need to get a life. The fact that I spend every therapy session talking about work must make me seem pretty banal.*

"Tell me about your next opponent."

Her next opponent... well, if you could even call him that. She couldn't wrap her head around how someone like Frances managed to get signed by a major wrestling promotion. The guy had zero formal training and no real technique - just a history of concussions.

"He's one of those backyard county fair wrestlers who only got into the business because his music career flopped. I swear I saw an article about him, like, 30 years ago, talking about his drug use. And that was before he even became a wrestler."

"He has to have some ability to have been signed to a company like the XWF?"

Sure, it's possible. But honestly, his talents seem limited to bloodsport wrestling. He doesn't respect the craft and has zero potential for mastering it.

"He's a one-trick pony who specializes in drinking too much and taking unprotected chair shots to the skull. He's about as qualified to face a prizefighter as a rubber chicken."

"Interesting..."

She made a few notes while staring down her nose at TJ. *What was that look about?* Tatiana wondered with a furrowed brow and a quizzical expression.

"What?"

"You're in two minds. You talk about being a prize fighter in one breath and complain about your inconsistency in the next. Classic TJ."

She parted her lips to reply, but what could TJ possibly say? It was somewhat true... She did perceive herself as a standard of integrity within the industry. A prizefighter rather than a brawler... Yet, she was not achieving the results one would expect from a prizefighter.

"And so, here I am, stuck in this chair. If my life weren't such a tangled mess, I'd probably be ruling the world by now."

"Everyone's life is complex, Tatiana. No one leads a flawless existence. Some individuals are simply more adept at compartmentalizing their struggles and suppressing them."

"So you're suggesting I should suppress it all and wait until I reach a breaking point?"

A pointed response... If she was expected to endure in silence, why was she spending $300 an hour on therapy?

"No, what I'm saying is that you need to stop believing you are the only one dealing with these issues. It's entirely natural to feel this way, especially when circumstances are not in your favor. Everyone struggles, everyone has doubts. What truly matters is how you address those doubts."

A response just as incisive - one that struck her deeply. She might even have been angry if it weren't so undeniably accurate. It couldn't be as simple as merely enduring and pretending... But perhaps exuding confidence could at least enhance her image in the eyes of others.

There would be no harm in trying...

"I understand, it's tough. This business is my life; I've dedicated more time to it than anything else, and I loathe being anything less than excellent."

"Everyone aspires to success. Even your opponent seeks to make an impact. While your low opinion of him may be justified, consider that he is ten years older than you and lacks the unique skills you possess. Imagine how vital this opportunity must feel to him."

His own mind? I had to laugh. I'm not convinced he has more than three brain cells to his name, let alone the self-awareness to set goals...

Still, she wasn't wrong. Marigold's options in this world are slim to none. Years of living the Rockstar dream have left his mind and body in shambles, and now he's desperately grasping at this last-ditch effort to stay relevant.

At least I am healthy, fit, and my personal life is thriving. I get to go home to a supermodel at the end of the day, while all he has waiting for him is a bottle of liquor and a baggie of black-market painkillers..

"Our session is nearly over. However, I encourage you to work on your perception. Exhibit confidence and pride, and remember that everyone is facing their own challenges alongside you. You are not alone. Shift your focus away from comparisons with the world and direct it toward self-improvement."

"I will. Thanks, doc. I'll see you in two weeks."

For now, she had to accept the unfavorable circumstances of an outdoor match in the cold against a raving lunatic.

What is the worst that could happen?

Interlude | Confidence, man.

On the record.

XWF Presents:
Frances Marigold v. Tatiana Jolee
Exhibition match

This is the pinnacle of your journey, Frank - your name on the card alongside one of the greatest technical wrestlers in the world. Someday, when you are old and gray (perhaps in a matter of weeks), you will reflect on the honor of having shared the ring with the G.O.A.T.

You were given the life-altering opportunity to compete against the most formidable superstar on the roster. And yes, I am aware - you consider yourself dangerous due to your penchant for risk. However, in truth, you are a danger only to yourself in that regard.

You might look at me and see nothing special. Maybe you think I'm just a mouthy girl from Canada. That's what everyone assumes - until the bell rings.

I possess the skills and intelligence to halt your career in its tracks. I am capable of defeating even the most formidable opponents. Fortunately for you, your career is already on its last legs, and your energy is far from robust. While this match will undoubtedly be painful, at least it'll be over quickly.

Lately, I haven't been feeling too generous. I've had the rug pulled out from under me so many times that the floor feels like home. But you can only push a wolverine so far before it snaps and takes its anger out on everything in proximity.

Which in this case, is you.

My struggle has always been multi-person matches. I fight like a champion, yet someone else takes the fall, leaving me on the losing end without ever truly being defeated.

I've spent weeks brooding over this frustration, watching someone else carry the TV Title while I'm stuck facing a nobody in a match with no real stakes for me. I get it - you're eager for that big win early in your XWF career. Time's not on your side in this business, and now you find yourself thrown into the ring with the most dangerous woman in the company.

What a pity...

As a Canadian, it's my duty to give you a proper welcome. And in pro-wrestling, that means a boot to your rear and an elbow to your throat.

Knowing your type... That might sound thrilling, maybe even provocative (ugh, no). But don't get carried away - I'm not here to grant you succor. I'm here to take you down like an injured racehorse.

By the time I'm through, even **Harambe** will think he got off easy.

(Too soon? Nah.)

For you, there's no tomorrow - just a buffet of misery and regret. It's like a theme park of torment with a rollercoaster of failure thrown in for fun. If you're lucky, I might not make this a thirty-minute mauling.

If not...
Well, you'll learn the hard way.

You might want to follow the example of your 1940 namesake and surrender ASAP, because there's nothing ahead but complete destruction - especially if you continue this futile resistance against the inevitable consequences.

Ruin looms over you like the sword of Damocles as we begin the month of June. However, there's still a chance to extend your career a bit longer. Stick to the rules, fight with integrity, and I won't have to take extreme measures.

But if you insist on that hardcore nonsense, I'll be the one to bring about your downfall.

ACT TWO | Blood Sugar Sex Magic

OFF CAMERA

Las Vegas, the epicenter of indulgence and excess. A city constructed by the mafia from the barren sands of the Nevada desert, serving as the modern-day equivalent of Gomorrah. For TJ, her idea of enjoyment was typically far removed from the chaos of Vegas; a quiet evening at home in serene Vancouver was a significantly more appealing prospect.

And yet, here she found herself...

Her most recent visit had been for work, a brief and rushed trip, resembling a tourist avoiding the crowd. On the only other occasion in recent months when she came for leisure, she found herself intoxicated and marrying her (now) girlfriend in an unauthorized and non-binding wedding ceremony.

They had the good fortune to hire the one illegal Elvis in the whole city to officiate a wedding that was never going to be legalized without the proper immigration steps.

"What is wrong with you, TJ?"

She questioned herself with a sense of trepidation in her voice. The entire strip was a chaotic blend of various characters - boomers, opportunists, pimps and their companions. Drugs of every kind were available to those seeking them, and the populace, numbed by the relentless neon lights, appeared indifferent to it all.

"You are at the pinnacle... a renowned wrestling icon, recognized worldwide. Your fans and friends exhibit unwavering loyalty to you... but what are you loyal to?"

An idea, a dream? Perhaps. In truth, the once formidable Tatiana was merely a mortal woman, weakened by ego and inclined toward self-destruction.

But why?

It was almost too complex to articulate - even for the woman living through it. At times, she could identify herself in her actions, while at other times, they seemed utterly alien to her character. There were moments of clarity; she was not devoid of regret or self-awareness. Yet, more often than not, she chose the wrong path over the right one.

My life seemed to take a drastic turn in 2019 when my wife unexpectedly asked for a divorce. Charlee was everything to me; I was deeply enamored with her. She was my best friend and the center of my universe. I could have died in 2018 feeling I had lived the most fulfilling life imaginable after six years of marriage to her.

But then it all fell apart. At the time, she attributed it to our growing distance or her longing for a child, an impossibility for us as a gay couple. Yet, we both understood those were just excuses. The truth was that Charlee had been living a lie. She loved me, but she never genuinely believed herself to be gay. Strangely enough, a part of me still finds it difficult to grasp. I suppose I had captivated her with what she perceived as an exciting experience, and as our friendship deepened, she misconstrued her emotions and acted hastily upon them.

*She was in love with the **idea** of **me**, not with the idea of being a lesbian. Perhaps my personality accelerated our relationship too quickly at the start? We dated for six months before marrying, spent six years as a married couple, and now have been apart for six years.*

6 6 6

If I were a religious person, I might draw certain conclusions.

The breakup devastated her profoundly, leaving a part of her irreparably changed. Then the pandemic struck, further isolating her from society. Ultimately, TJ left her

home and the comfortable life she had built in Canada. She departed from a federation where she had been a prominent figure and moved to America, where she had to begin anew.

"Up, down, up, down... It has been a heinous seesaw."

I took a year-long hiatus from dating, largely imposed by the pandemic. However, when I re-entered the dating scene, I experienced remarkable success. My confidence, charm, and tomboyish allure became a formidable asset within the lesbian community. I found myself connecting with women half my age, having extraordinary experiences, and forming genuine friendships along the way.

Then I became engaged to ***Hope Russo****... And we all know how that concluded. Perhaps I deserved it all along? Perhaps she was simply too good for me?*

"I will probably find myself wondering the same about Madison someday..."

Tatiana's wrestling career was marked by dramatic highs and lows. Her therapist frequently suggested that her guilt might function as an unconscious saboteur, akin to a covert operative behind enemy lines, wreaking havoc on all she endeavored to achieve. However, such assessments were easily made from the sidelines. Regardless of her personal struggles, she consistently dedicated herself fully to the craft.

“A lot of my bad luck is down to circumstance... I was cheated out of the Ides, came within a hair of being TV Champion several times, and I’ve never yet been the one pinned in a multi-person match.”

It was like a struggling baseball team akin to - *we’ll get ‘em next season*. At some point, you either fire the coach and GM or learn to embrace the role of lovable loser.

“I’m too good to be considered a bust... And I’ve got at least another decade in me.”

Barring some catastrophic and unforeseen injury, of course.

Thus, facing an opponent like **Frances Marigold** was deeply troubling for her. While she had unwavering confidence in her abilities and firmly believed she would defeat him, she worried about the potential cost.

Much like Goldberg’s infamous kick that ended Bret Hart’s career, it only takes one reckless individual to derail a legend. Stepping into the ring with someone like that

always carried the risk of him making a careless move that could prematurely end her career.

"Put it in the back of your mind... You can't worry about shit that's out of your control."

She attempted to calm herself as she paused in the hallway before her hotel room door. A swipe of the black card granted her access to the luxurious suite. Once inside, she set her suitcase by the door and loosened the slim black tie of her dress shirt. The flight had been relatively short, but the layover at LAX had been unpleasant enough to make her briefly consider driving the rest of the way to Las Vegas.

And I despise driving...

She removed her fedora and blazer before unbuttoning the cuffs of her shirt. It was getting late, and she was relieved to finally be in her hotel room. She kicked off her dress shoes and savored the plush carpet beneath her feet. The moment was brief, however, as TJ quickly made her way to the mini bar to prepare a rum and coke - a small indulgence after a long day of travel.

"Hey stranger. You've arrived."

Without warning, a pair of arms slid over her shoulders from behind, accompanied by the gentle pressure of her lover's body against her back. TJ felt her cheek rest softly against her shoulder as a captivating fragrance enveloped her senses.

"Sorry for being late. The delay at LAX was soul crushing."

The embrace loosened, allowing TJ the freedom to lift her arms and turn to face her *girlfriend*. She looked as radiant as ever, her charming *French-Canadian* features illuminated by the tepid kitchenette lighting, her full lips and raven-black hair styled elegantly in a tidy topknot. The icing on the cake was a pretty red and black Japanese inspired silk robe which extended down to just above her knees.

"It's alright, darling. Good things are always worth the wait."

With precision, her painted nails traced a line along the sleeve of TJ's button-up dress shirt, her eager gaze consuming her with the intensity of a predator ready to strike.

“And just look at you, all dressed up so handsomely. You know what that does to me.”

“My, my Ms. Cartier… Are you coming on to me?”

The question drew a little laugh and a playful roll of the eyes.

“Ms. Cartier has been dead for years… It’s just **Salem**, these days.”

This was their little routine whenever they met up - it was overdone but still their private little routine. **Salem** wasn’t exactly her *girlfriend*, not *officially* anyway. To everyone else, TJ’s heart belonged to **Madison Maddox**, the young, vibrant supermodel who was half her age.

Salem was a story of an entirely different nature - *an older, more experienced lover, closer to TJ's age*. Someone she might have married had life taken a different course. In many respects, she felt a deep connection to Salem, who seemed like a wandering ghost, aimlessly traversing this realm of existence.

Why can’t I ever say no to her? I know it’s wrong, I know I’m awful for cheating on Madison, but I just can’t help myself. Here I am again, drawn back to the one woman who always has this hold on me.

“You didn’t answer the question.”

Tatiana teased with a grin and a playful wink before taking a sip of her drink.

“Oh? How improper of me. Perhaps this will clarify things?”

With a subtle move, Salem loosened her robe and let it slide off her shoulders, revealing her bare form. Tatiana bit her lip, her eyes tracing the alluring curves, intricate tattoos, and voluptuous breasts of her french-canadian muse.

“I’m so weak…” *she murmured*.

“Well then.” *Salem said with a smirk, gently tugging on TJ’s tie like a leash.* “Maybe I can help you regain some strength?”

She punctuated her words with a wink and a soft kiss on the cheek before turning away, her inviting gaze leading the way toward the bedroom.

“Yes, please!”

Finishing her drink in one swift motion, TJ quickly followed after her.

It seemed like the night was just getting started...

(Word count 3960)