

A black limousine rolled through the quiet streets of Houston, Texas escorted by Black SUVs. In the backseat sat James Shark alone.

No Camila, no entourage, just himself with the most prestigious, valuable, piece of gold in professional wrestling today. The XWF Universal Championship rested on his lap, the title's surface caught the light pouring in from the window, its gold plates shining like a second sun and matching the gold tie that wrapped around his black collar shirt.

Winning this Championship wasn't just about the glory - but the *power*.

The power of being number one. The power of representing the biggest wrestling federation in the world. The power of being the world fucking Champion.

Shark sat in silence, his eyes closed but he wasn't sleeping.

There was a calmness to this ride that didn't exist in previous rides to the courthouse. The reason for that started to expose itself the closer they got, like a distant storm, noise began to creep in — faint at first, then growing louder. Shark opens one eye, lazily glancing out of the tinted windows. At first it was just traffic - more cars, more people crowding the sidewalks... but then he spotted the signs.

## FREE SHARK

Big, bold, messy lettering with his name - *everywhere*.

He watched as the signs bobbed up and down like waves in an ocean. Men and women of all ages cried out for him, chanting his name. A slow, satisfied grin spread across his face as he comfortably went back to having his eyes closed.

Everything was going according to plan.

The public was supposed to hate him. The evidence the prosecution had presented and released was supposed to make him a **monster** - instead, they worshipped him. They all shouted out for his freedom despite the cold truth of his actions. The facts of the trial meant nothing because of the story he had sold them.

He spun the narrative, played the media, the fans, he had everyone eating out of the palm of his hands like starving dogs.

The chants started to become almost deafening the moment the limousine finally came to a stop on Franklin Street. The driver gets out of his seat and walks out to open the door for Shark. Shark

slowly puts on some dark shades and throws the Championship over his shoulder. He then steps out into the storm he had created, he spreads his arms out, soaking in the energy. He could barely see the Harris County courthouse, there were just people, hundreds if not thousands.

Security guards begin to clear a path for him and push the people back. The U.S Marshals step out of the SUVs and begin to follow Shark as he walks towards the courthouse.



He walks tall and proud, looking like absolute money. The flashing light of the ankle monitor from behind his dress pants was all but invisible compared to the blinding light of his visible success. Security guards struggled to stop the swarm of supporters from getting to him.

The tables had definitely turned.

This was no longer The People vs James Shark...

This was The People AND James Shark vs The American Justice System.

**\*THUD\***

The sound of the XWF Universal Championship being set down onto the polished wood of the defense table could be heard as the scene transitions into the courtroom. Judge Housefold lowers his glasses and looks at Shark as if he is waiting for him to say something, Shark just stares back at him.

**“Mr. Marshall, where is your legal representation? We need to begin.”**

“Then go ahead and begin. Everybody saw what happened. She took her ball and went home.”

Shark gestures towards the Universal Championship on the table.

“This is my representation now.”

The prosecution, Ian Henderson, begins to laugh and shake his head. Judge Housefold frowns deeply.

“That Championship is your representation?”

“That’s right. This Championship represents the people. I don’t know if you saw the news or been outside but the people represent me.”

“So what you are saying is you will be representing yourself?”

The judge sits back in his chair and takes a deep breath, he studies him closely.

“That is highly inadvisable. You understand then that you are waiving your right to counsel?”

Shark nods his head. The judge sighs and shrugs his shoulders.

“Very well.”

Ian’s face was bright red with barely restrained anger as he spoke out.

“Your honor, this is ridiculous. Mr. Marshall ***CONTINUES*** to make a deliberate mockery out of these proceedings. His press conference after his last match was a calculated attack against the integrity of our system. Since then I have been subjected to harassment, intimidation and death threats.”

Ian turns sharply to Shark, his eyes narrowing.

“Our key witness Harley Jo has also been subject to this abuse and she now fears for her life.”

Shark mouths “*fears for her life*” and holds back laughter as he shakes his head.

“As expected, he shows no remorse. His daughter and her mother feel as though they are in danger and it amuses him.”

“What amuses me is my ex-wife done found **ANOTHER** excuse to not come here today. Y’all stay cosplaying as some puppets gettin’ controlled by her.

Shark is expecting a comeback from Ian but this time he doesn’t get it, there’s an awkward moment of silence in the room. Shark slowly looks over towards Ian and can see that he is no longer red with anger, instead he looks calm. Shark scrunches his eyebrows and watches him closely.

“Your honor, we call forth Harley Jo to the stand.”

Shark’s eyes grow wide, he immediately spins around as the courtroom doors open. Harley enters the room, officers walking her in to ensure her safety.



Shark felt a ripple through his chest, his heart felt like it was about to beat right out of it. He sees her walk towards the front of the court in slow motion. A dozen emotions waged war inside of him - anger, concern, betrayal, happiness, heartbreak... but underneath all the emotions overwhelming him was....unconditional love. It showed on his face before he could even think about hiding it. It was what Camila was worried about happening. He still loved her.

Despite all the stress that weighed on her face, she still looked as beautiful as she did on their wedding day. Ian takes a good look at Shark - He no longer looked comfortable, no longer felt like he was in control. Ian enjoyed every second of it.

Harley didn't make eye contact with Shark - *not once*. The cameras capture every moment. She walks right past him. For the first time since he entered the courthouse, Shark's head drops. He slowly takes a seat and stares down at the defense table as Harley gets into the witness booth. The bailiff ensures she is sworn in.

"Raise your right hand. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help you God?"

"I do."

Henderson smiles as he walks past Shark, his head remained down, lifeless, no grins, no swagger. The XWF Universal Championship was the only thing on that side of the room with any weight.

As Ian went ahead and questioned her about the charges, her voice was steady but soft as she recounted everything. She spoke about receiving the frantic phone call from the school. She spoke about the fear that ripped through her when she realized Kaydence was gone. The nightmare only got worse when she had found out Shark was the one that had taken her, fearing for Kaydence's safety due to Shark's temper and drug usage.

With each word, Shark feels himself sinking lower into his seat. His fists balled up from underneath the table. It wasn't just what she was saying - it was *how* she was saying it.

Like Kaydence wasn't with her father.

Like Kaydence was in danger.

Like he was a *monster*.

Henderson continues to question her, she goes into detail about the night she filed the restraining order. The darkness she saw in his eyes. The grip he had on her neck.

She dives into more of their history.

Each answer carefully paints Shark as....

Reckless.  
Unstable.  
.....*Dangerous.*

Shark's jaw tightened until it ached. Every negative emotion started to take over as he started to remember what he had planned to do. Flashbacks of their last encounter trickled in as she pleaded with him to drop evidence from this case that would ruin her relationship... ruin her. He sat in his seat fidgeting his feet. Impatient to tell his side of the story. Then finally the prosecutor finished.

"No further questions, your honor."

Shark slowly raises his head and looks right up at Harley. For the first time she's looking right at him. His eyes glaring at her as he slowly stands up. He wondered if she could see the darkness in his eyes *again*. He walks over to her until he is a few feet away from the booth.



"Are you scared right now, Harley?"

"**OBJECTION.** Intimidating the witness."

"The whole point of her restraining order is that she fears me. Now here I am right in front of her. All I'm tryin' to do is clarify if that's true or not."

"Overruled. Tread carefully Mr. Marshall."

Harley looks at Shark with concern in her eyes, like she was worried about him.

“...I’m scared of the man you’ve become.”

Shark frowns and crosses his arms.

“And what exactly is that? What kind of man have I become?”

“A man who took drugs and drinking too far. A man who broke his promises - promises that he’d never raise his hands on me. A man who took our daughter - “

***“I WENT TO GO SEE MY DAUGHTER CUZ I THOUGHT I’D NEVER SEE HER AGAIN!”***

“Objection!! Your honor, he is not asking questions, he’s testifying!”

“Sustained. Mr. Marshall you will confine yourself to questions or I will end this cross-examination, do I make myself clear!??”

“Crystal. Let’s start simple - You ain’t show up to court last time after you told the world I convinced you not to testify. True or false?”

“False. I sent a text to the prosecution.”

“A text that was read out loud durin’ a televised trial being streamed all around the world. You didn’t just tell that to the cornball behind me or the court. You told *everyone*. You told the world something that wasn’t true. You lied to them.”

“Objection!!!! Badgering the witness, your honor.”

“Overruled. Stick to your questions, Mr. Marshall.”

Shark rolls his eyes but doesn’t take his focus off Harley.

“Tell me more about how I convinced you not to testify. Walk us through it.”

Harley hesitates.

“Well we met up and-”

Shark interrupts her.

“Where did we meet?”

“Your gym office.”

“So you came to me?”

“....Yes.”

“Did you tell me you was comin’? Did I know?”

Ian Henderson looks stressed in the background. His hand covered half his face as he sat in his seat. Harley answers the question, but it’s almost a whisper.

“No.....*I just showed up.*”

“Lemme be clear because you was a bit quiet there. You showed up - unannounced - to *my* place of business. Alone?”

Harley doesn’t respond.

“You violated your **OWN** restraining order didn’t you?”

There were tears building up in her eyes but he ignored it. She’s reluctant to answer but eventually does.

“...Yes”



“The same restraining order you have on me because you’re afraid of me and yet, you came to see me - *alone* - without anyone knowin’. Interesting. So what happened that night?”

“We... we talked. About the case. The evide-”

“What evidence?”

He interrupts her again. Her focus shifts away from him and she makes eye contact with her fiance who is sitting in the stands watching. Shark follows her eyes and looks at her fiance. Shark scoffs. He remembers their meeting. He remembers her telling him that she wasn’t going to let him ruin a good thing, that she was finally happy with a man that cared for her. His blood starts to boil with jealousy. Shark furiously turns his head back to Harley.

“Go ahead. Come on. Tell this courtroom what evidence you referrin’ to already!”

“I - I’d rather not -”

“No??? Okay I’ll help you. Was it the evidence of you comin’ over to *fuck* me for six months straight?”

Gasps throughout the gallery. Ian rises up to his feet so fast his chair almost goes flying back.

“Your honor, **OBJECTION!!** Inflammatory language and offensive language.”

“Sustained. Mr. Marshall, you *will* watch your tone and language. This is your only warning.”

“You didn’t just violate your restraining order once did you? No, hundreds of times. **HALF A YEAR** of sleepin’ with me behind your soon to be husband’s back has got to be the evidence, right?”

Harley stiffens. The courtroom is dead silent. Suddenly a loud creak of a bench in the gallery is heard. Shark doesn’t turn his head, instead he watches Harley. He can tell exactly what that

noise is in the background from her instant reaction. Her fiance had gone up and stormed out of the courtroom. Tears begin to flow down her face.

“Bro had no idea...”

“.....James, stop, please”

Her pleading voice could barely be heard as she desperately attempted to wipe her tears away.

“Sounds to me like you led him on just like you led *me* on. All those late night calls, the texts, the promises that this - *us* - was gonna mean somethin’. That we’d be a family again. That I’d have my daughter again.”

“**OBJECTION!!!!!!!!!!**”

“Sustained. Mr. Marshall ask a question do not cut a promo.”

“A Promo?”

Shark mutters underneath his breath. He had enough. If the judge thought that was him cutting a promo he would show them what a real one looked like.

“**THIS WHOLE COURT CASE IS A GODDAMN JOKE!!!!!!!!!!**”

The judge immediately begins to slam down his gavel but Shark continues yelling out over the banging as he spins around and points at Ian.

“**SHE LIED AND YOU CALLED IT WITNESS TAMPERING.**”

Shark then spins around and points at the judge.

“**SHE LIED AND YOU PUT ME ON HOUSE ARREST FOR IT.**”

The sheriff begins to walk towards Shark along with courtroom security. He points right at Harley.

“**YOU LIED. YOU'RE NOTHIN' BUT A DAMN LIAR HARLEY.**”

Suddenly Harley jumps up to her feet, her two hands slamming down onto the ledge of the booth which causes a bang that was surprisingly louder than the judge's gavel. It commands the attention of everyone in the room.

***"FUCK YOU JAMES. I DIDN'T LIE ABOUT ANYTHING. I WANTED US TO BE TOGETHER AGAIN. YOU TOLD ME YOU CHANGED. BUT YOU DIDN'T. YOU CONTINUED USING. YOU MADE YOUR CHOICE. I LOVED YOU.... I STILL LOVE YOU!"***

Shark freezes. He's grabbed by the sheriff but nobody needs to grab Harley because she exits the booth and begins to storm out of the courtroom, sobbing uncontrollably. The grip on Shark's arm loosens as he stands there completely calm and silent.

The judge begins to lecture him for the outburst. He looks up at the judge and can see his mouth moving but he can't hear the words. There's only one thing he could hear ringing through his ears and it was the echo that she still loved him.

Those tears she shed were real. He had put them on her face so many times in the past.

He looks around at the cameras, the police, the courtroom. It was like everything clicked in this moment. The mess he created. The consequences of his actions. The damage he had caused.

The judge calls for a recess and advises they would proceed with closing statements and then a verdict once the court resumes.

Shark goes back towards the defense table and sits down, trying to process everything.





Maybe *I am* a monster, chat.

I been lookin' a lot at the man in the mirror lately and on most days I don't recognize who's starin' back at me.

How about you, Yelena?

Who do you see when you look in the mirror?

Is it yourself? World class judo Champion.

Or is it Maraeth? The desperate cry for help.

You've made it abundantly clear that you have a monster. You've shoved it down all our throats and played this game to the point people actually believe you - *fear you*.

Look into my eyes. Not me.

I think you wanna be the monster in the closet so damn bad that you don't realize you're actually the scared little kid in bed that won't shut the fuck up about the monster.

Let's turn the lights on and shine it on Maraeth for a second. What does that dumb bitch call herself, again? *"The eater of dreams"*

## HOW FITTING.

How fitting because you must keep her well fed with all the dreaming you've been doing over **MY** Championsip. How fitting because she's going to be one of the reasons those dreams die on Thursday night.

You're a world class competitor, Gorgo. You don't need all that supernatural bullshit. Yet - you rely on it.

I see you dominating left, right and center outside this company. Wins after wins, losses only comin' so few and far in between. Fact of the matter is a lot of these motherfuckers can't touch you. That ain't because of some entity. That's *you*.

I've seen those flashes of brilliance here in this company like when you lost to the clock against Nickles only to blindside that motherfucker and take his Xtreme Championship.

It's my fault you made it this far.

It's my wrong to right.

It should have been me and you that night on Warfare. Mistakes were made. If it wasn't for my own damn missteps I promise you that I would have ended you and this whole charade you got goin' on right there and then.

But now I get to expose you on a bigger stage, on a bigger night, with the stakes much higher.

Freddy Krueger ain't shit when he ain't got the fear. You've done well to find that fear in others so far. The smoke and mirrors are able to make these wrestlers quiver the moment the match is announced. These people are losin' against you before that bell even rings.

But **WHY!?**

You stand at 6 foot 1 covered with deep insecurity from head to toe. How can a woman look **SO BIG** and **SO STRONG** yet be **SO WEAK** at the same time!??

Physically you are a fuckin' unit.

Mentally? You're as tiny as an ant.

Every wrestler I know got monsters, you're just one of the few that's weak enough to let those monsters control you....consume you....**SEND TWEETS FOR YOU.**

Y'all mean to tell me Maraeth is suppose to make me feel anything other than instant cringe??? I'll be damned if I go fearin' a demon that got Twitter fingers.

Who the hell you possessed by anyways ???? Shakespeare if he was a horror fanatic? You wanna trash talk me online with poems ??? Say less. Let me talk to you in a way the dumb hoe pullin' the strings will understand....

....Ahem.... Check it out....

Shark clears his throat and beats his chest with a single fist before he begins to talk in a deep, demonic voice with his eyes rolled to the back of his head, clearly making a mockery out of Yelena and her entity.

What roars in the dark....

Lifts like a beast....

But still needs a voice in her head just to speak!??

**YOU.**

Yelena.

Or Maraeth.

Shit, Whoever's got the Wi-fi password at the time.

You pump your veins full of roids and rage....

But can't take one step forward without a monster holdin' your hand!  
All that muscle - **STILL** not strong enough to stand on your own!

**GONE** will be the narrative that James Shark can't defend XWF Gold.  
And gone with it? Your whole illusion.  
Any last shred of credibility you carried.

World-class judo Champion to cringy gothic fanfiction.  
You traded the gold medals for dumb face paint, a split personality and an emotional  
support escort that has more bodies than you and mines wrestling record **COMBINED!**

Shark closes his eyes. He then opens it with his eyes back to normal. A smirk spreads across his  
face as he leans closer into the camera.

How's that for some poems and riddles Gorgo!? Am I kickin' the hornests nest yet?

Ain't no one steppin' to you like me. That's cuz you ain't face no one like me. I am the  
motherfuckin' Champion. I am the man around here. Top of the food chain. Top of the  
mountain. The pinnacle. Big Daddy James. Crème de la crème.

I ain't lost a one on one match in this company and I don't plan to.  
Not now. Not to the Gabi Garcia of pro wrestling.

**NO** amount of heavy lifting or protein farts is goin' to change that for you.

You understand?

There is **NO** amount of anabolic steroid on this planet that can stop my elbow from  
crashing into your jaw at 100 miles per hour.

There is **NO** amount of creatine in this universe that will prevent you from getting knocked  
the fuck out when it does.

*MAY DAY PART THREE* in the estate of Corey Smith we're goin' to go....

## MONSTER HUNTING.

But make no mistake about our roles. You are the hunter.

You gonna find out the real monster ain't in your head....

It'll be across the ring from you.



Shark stands behind the defense table, he hadn't taken a seat since he had seen the jury walk in. The courtroom is extremely tense - everybody quiet. This was the moment everyone had been waiting for.

“Before we proceed with the verdict, I want to acknowledge both the prosecution and the defense for their closing statements.”

Shark could barely even remember what he had said. It was something about second chances. Something similar to the press conference he held. He was too disconnected at the moment. The only thing that was in his head was Harley's words and emotions on replay.

“Now, after careful consideration of all evidence, testimonies and arguments presented... on the charge of Parental Kidnapping.... this court finds James Marshall.....**guilty**”

There's a small gasp in the gallery, a whisper here, a whisper there... then all of a sudden the gallery erupts with booing and side conversations as people rise to their feet in anger and disbelief. The judge immediately begins to slam down on his gavel.

**BANG!**

**BANG!!**



**BANG!!!**

**“ORDER. IN. THE. COURTROOM!!!!!!!”**

The judge is able to bring silence throughout the room. Shark slowly puts his hands behind his back, ready to be handcuffed.

“Based on the mitigating factors and conflicting evidence... the sentence will be as follows... Mr. Marshall will **not** serve any prison time. His house arrest will be lifted and he will be ordered to complete 1,000 hours of anger management therapy and pay a fine of \$500,000 to the State.”

The room erupts again - this time with applause and celebration. Shark blinks. He slowly removes his hands from the cuffing position and rests them at his side. He turns his head slightly to look at the prosecution and Ian is frozen in disbelief.

Shark exhales. He should be celebrating. This was a win. He was supposed to be behind bars. The testimonies, the prior criminal history, the overwhelming evidence. Instead he got what many would perceive as a slap on the wrist.

This was a victory. But at what cost?

He stood still and silent. Somewhere deep down, beneath the Champion, beneath the *monster*...was a man wondering what he was supposed to do with this second chance if he could not spend it with the two people that meant the most to him.