



## THE BLUE DRESS

*New York City is a bustling town. The City That Never Sleeps, they say. On this day, the night sky is clear and on the edges of the city you might be able to see some stars but where we are, it's all neon lights, glitz and glamor. Men are coming out of old buildings with tuxedos on, women on their arms with sparkly dresses and impossibly styled hair, they're all laughing and enjoying the company they have kept during their entertainment, whatever that may have been.*

*Across the street, though, in an empty dimly lit parking lot sits an early 1970s black muscle car. Leaning against it is a dark figure, watching the city go by him. Taxis and Ubers, all ferrying these fine folks back to their homes or next destinations, arm in arm.*

*Corey Black, hood up over his head, peers on with intent. Every time a new door opens, his eyes dart in that direction. Watching. Waiting. He's just ever so hidden from their view, but he certainly isn't hiding.*

Then it happens, one of the heavy wooden doors swings open and out walks a tall, beautiful blonde woman wearing an immaculate cobalt blue evening gown. Her hands and arms are covered in the same color long gloves, shoulders bare to the cold brisk air but it doesn't bother her. She glides over to a group of people, making small talk about what they just enjoyed together, Corey's eyes never leaving her. A black SUV pulls around, she waves goodbye to the group and gets in the back seat. It drives off into the night, Corey watching it go the entire time. He breathes in deep, exhaling slowly.

Pops the handle of the door and slips into his car, starting the engine and leaving the parking lot in a bit of a rush, he turns the other way though, not following the SUV. As he gets onto the street, Corey drops the clutch and stomps on the gas, spinning the back wheels and sending the car rocketing forward! He watches as the tires grip the road, the speedometer rises quickly, buildings and lights become a blur as he careens carelessly down what usually would be a busy New York street, he just so happened to catch it at the perfect moment.

Eventually Corey stops, slowing his pace to a more speed limit level. He's a good chunk of the way through town now, into a different borough even over the Brooklyn Bridge.

The buildings become less and less beautiful in this direction. The street does, too, as Corey is dodging potholes and construction cones now too. Eventually he pulls into a parking lot next to an unassuming business. Two black SUVs sit in the parking lot to his left. Corey gets out of his car, as do five - make that six total suited men out of the SUVs. Five of them are huge, absolute units. The last is an older fella, not frail by any means but he's seen some years. They're all wearing black suits with red undershirts and black ties. Corey looks down at his gray joggers, black hoodie and white sneakers.

"I feel a little underdressed for this occasion!" Corey says with a smile. Nobody cracks a lip. Corey's eyes widen as the smaller old man and one of the muscles walk past him, the muscle pointing to a door on the side of the building.

They all walk in, Corey looks back to see the other men crowding around the entry but staying outside. They're in a dimly lit back hallway, the older gentleman leads Corey and the behemoth down to a larger door that opens into a beautiful, ornate room with a bar on the right, a stage at the end of the long room and just enough people to possibly fit two hundred patrons. Corey walks out into the open space in the middle, a smile on his face.

"I think we can come to an agreement?" asks the old man, his mustache twitching as he speaks.

Corey walks over, extending his hand, "as long as you can keep the thin blue line off my tail, September is going to be a hell of a month!"

The old man smiles finally, shaking Corey's hand. "You know," the old man says before letting go, "Tommi and some others tried to talk to the spirits here about a decade ago. They said it's a real hotbed for paranormal activity."

A sigh from Corey Black, "that's why I left Norway so fast. Kinda over that whole thing for a minute, getting business done is better than dealing with ghosts and demons."

The old man shrugs, turning to the muscle and pointing out, "I trust you'll lock up when you're through?" he asks, tossing an old key ring to Corey.

"For sure, thank you! I'll be in touch!" Corey responds, almost joyful. He wanders back over to the stage, not too far of a walk from the door. It's quaint. Real fuckin' quaint. Hole in the wall, bar, stage, standing room only and that's about it. But Corey closes his eyes and envisions the bloodshed that'll happen here. Then he thinks about the blonde in the blue dress and he's snapped out of his daydream as his cell phone rings.

"Yellow?" he says, nobody says 'hello.' Without saying anything else, Corey walks through the door to the backstage area, through the long hallway and to the door to the outside, opening it and meeting an old friend. His breath leaves his body.

"You look.. wow," he says, holding the door open and extending his hand to the blonde in the blue dress.

She smiles, looking him right in the eye, they're basically the same height; "so this is it, huh?"

"Yep, the city shut them down a little bit ago but there's just something so authentic about it," Corey says, leading her to the door. He opens it with his foot, guiding her in.

*She's.. puzzled? "This is it? Where are you going to have the ring?" she asks. Corey smiles and walks over to the stage.*

*"I'm thinking about just.. right here, no ring," he says, gesturing to maybe three feet off the ground platform. She shrugs, nodding.*

*"I know you didn't invite me here to show me a condemned concert venue," she says, flipping her blonde hair over her shoulder, "and I did see you."*

*"Yeah I.. wanted to make sure you were in town," he says, rubbing the back of his neck. "It's been a while," he groans.*

*"We got busy. You're in like three companies now, how do you even have time to think?" she asks, "and PANTHEON?!"*

*Corey sits down on one of the stray chairs, "yeah it's crazy. I'm jetting to Norway every week, don't ask, then wherever in the world I'm fighting for TRIAD, I have the CU:LT Killdozer Cup coming up, XWF Xtreme Title match on the horizon, XIII being planned.. busy busy."*

*"It's for the best, you know," she says, kneeling down in front of Corey and grabbing his hand, "we had a long time. It's best to look back on that with positive eyes instead of internalizing it like you are now."*

*He goes to speak, looking up from the floor, but she cuts him off.*

*"You have a renewed focus on your career. Go show them why you're who you say you are. I'll be watching," she says before dropping his hand and waltzing to the door. Corey just watches as she goes through the door, disappearing into the black darkness of the night.*

*He breathes in deep once again, falling backward into the chair and exhaling hard.*

*"I just had to pick New York City."*

---

*The setting switches to a darkened room, one by one television screens along the back wall light up. CRT TVs, all different sizes, all cascading turning on. Their soft glow illuminates the room, Corey Black stands with his back to the screens. They all suddenly change,*

*half of them show Dionysis, half of them Bobby Bourbon, no rhyme or reason, all different photos of the two combatants.*

"Professional wrestling is never as straightforward as I'd hoped it would be. It's a fickle mistress. One day you're fighting for the biggest prize, the next you're teaming with your stablemate and then...

...well. And then someone is claiming responsibility for a 'boom' period.

Let me make one thing perfectly clear, XWF. I'm not here to usher in a new era. Pantheon isn't in this company to revitalize anything. We came to XWF because this is the place we were told about for years, said to house the best wrestlers. It does.

Now.

You know what actually needs fixed? Referees.

How is it that in MOST of my appearances for this place, I've had refs that didn't show shit? I should be walking into my first solo appearance in XWF a double champion, yet the officiating staff here is full of inept goofs.

I've overcome more than that, but goddamn man, let's put some budget into training these dipshits if we're forced to abide by their rule.

Should this be an age that will be looked back upon as the level of talent somehow keeps rising, a man left in the dust - as he is everywhere he competes - will be Dion. Excuse me, Dionysis. Lord of the Vine, Master of Revels and...

...Catalyst.

Funny how that wrestling thing goes, isn't it? I set out on this journey of discovery to fight men and women that I've only dreamed of and here I am, right back in the fucking playground with Dionysis. The man who lost the title we're fighting for to Pariah - someone I need to find and kill for spitting in my eyes, who lost it to Bobby Bourbon by way of.. fucking.. trampling? I thought I'd seen it all.

But yes, Dion, before you even say it, I am the reason why you're not the champion right now. It's not that you lost it in the first place,

it's that I tried to pull a fast one with the worst officiating crew on the planet. Honestly, that's on me.

It might be on me that you think you're the reason I'm here, too. You built this place up from the ashes, reigniting - no, who the hell am I kidding, you showed up and have had your thumb up your ass for a year. Made your goof fuck expressions to hordes of D-tier wrestlers, through pure persistence alone made off with some gold and now here you sit. Claiming glory that, again, isn't yours to claim.

A tale as old as time, Dionysis taking credit for shit someone else did.

It's nice to see you out of the shackles we were once contained, though I have to wonder - if I'm washed and mid, what the fuck are you?

I don't have to convince you of a single thing. You know all the tales, you've lived under my rule. You, Dion, WILL kneel to the King. And this division? Bro, just save yourself. You know better.

I'm going to treat you like an Action Wrestling World Tag Team Championship reign and highlight your fucking downfall.

Every iteration of Dion has been, somehow, more over the top and cringe than the last. The rookie that didn't know any better and joined any stable he could just to have a sliver of that could be construed as friendship, Necurat Corporation, the Temple of the Dragon, Coliseum Wrestling Association - how the fuck is Fat Mike, Dion? And now look at you. Red Emperor energy is what you are trying to give off, right? It falls flatter than still wine. Don't ever wonder why you haven't ever been the face of a division, let alone a company; check that face in the mirror and ask yourself if you're truly the guy.

In our home fucking town.

Look yourself in the eye, then look me in the eyes, Dion. Tell yourself that you can do it and then tell me. Until you believe it, I don't. Once I'm done with TRIAD, XWF is my full time gig, buckaroo. You've gone from living under Corey Black to, well, living under Corey Black. I'm sure you can figure out some way to entertain yourself. Perhaps a nice vacation to the nearest hospital after I drive my elbow so far into your skull you'd swear Prince himself was serenading you.

You've been champing at the bit to get this, haven't you? Me, in the ring, against you. Just us and some other fuckin' guy. Bring me this Dionysis that somehow has garnered legions of fans in his crusade. Deliver upon me the warrior that slays kings and gods alike. It'll take all you have, Dion, all you have and more to bring me down. Together we have collapsed evil but you, just you - aren't enough to deny me my rightful place as XWF Xtreme Champion.

Dionysis dines on elbow strikes and carnage. Bobby Bourbon gets the same meal.

Hi, Bobby. Allow me to introduce myself to you officially. My name is Corey Black. You may know me from being that fuckin' dude that everyone kinda shits their pants when they're put up against, the thing that the monster in your closet checks under his bed for and more recently, the most extreme son of a bitch you'll ever come across.

Dion knows this, you probably don't, but I spent three hundred and forty four days as hardcore champion where we come from. Twenty years ago I introduced my corner of the world to ultraviolence. Every Friday the thirteenth I host a show that holds the most disgusting destruction you'll ever see; a man once injected bleach into another's eye.

Just, you know, so you know who you're really dealing with.

Because I know about you, Bozo Bobby Bourbon.

Robbie Bourbon?

Puddle of meat on the floor, collapsed after the colossal ass-kicking I'm about to bring down?

Doesn't fucking matter what you're called, bitch. You're one of those stalwarts. Been around forever, amounting to whatever self-deprecating parody you've become. Honestly if you said you were an actual politician, I might believe you.

I can't believe I'm finally wrestling Chet Dakota's uncle. Man stole your whole thing. Kinda did it better, too.

You're so intertwined with society, even appearing on Dr. Phil's show but somehow, some way, failed to heed anything the man said. You just

won't listen, whatever's rattling around in that skull of yours falls out of your mouth and becomes your own gospel.

Listen close, Bourbon. Send a whole fucking herd at me, I'll turn those motherfuckers into steak and bash your bones to dust with their innards. That King of the Wrestlers thing, that applies to when I am bound by rules of the sacred mat.

You're not meeting that Corey Black.

In all its glory, you and Dion are going to have to stand across the ring from Deathproof.

Basically, you have to kill me to beat me. Until my last breath, the final beat of my heart, I'll be fighting. Clawing. Winning. It's what Pantheon does and I'll be proud at the end of the night to show off all the new hardware we'll be collecting bang bang bang, right in a row.

I know a lot of people have said that before and believe me, a lot more will once I'm actually in the ground. You can believe me, though, Bobby Bobbo Bobarino. I will fucking destroy you, within an inch of your miserable existence and be joyous about it. You can nod, smile and fuck back off to Fuckville where you belong.

This is Pantheon's XWF now.

We aren't here to 'take over' or any of that stupid bullshit, we're here to wrestle some people, beat the shit out of others and show the world at large that we're the top echelon of this thing. I had company after company sending contracts my way. How about you, Bob?

Shit, or even you, Dion?

Nah, nobody is backing up any trucks to your places. You're chum, the people that get fed to the big fish. I'm a goddamned Megalodon, this is going to be a light snack on my way to the true meals.

You two are behemoths, though. Physically larger than me. By a good margin.

In stature alone, if I stood on my wrestling knowledge I'd dwarf you fucking fools. I've forgotten more holds than you'll ever know. I've beat men twice your size and six times your acumen.



Basically what I'm saying is; you're both outmatched and you've already lost before the bell has even rang."

---

*We're in Minneapolis, Minnesota now, the skyline of the city is seen through the floor to ceiling windows of Corey Black's high rise apartment, dozens of stories into the clouds. He's just sitting on his couch, a thunderstorm in the distance providing little flashes of light and entertainment. He watches it with his head to the right, looking to the side of his giant television screen that's switched off. The storm rages there on the horizon, Corey's focus shifts downward to his cell phone, where he's scrolling through images of himself and the blonde woman in happier times. Eventually it gets too much to handle, Corey turns his phone over and drops it screen side down on the couch. He stands up, shaking his arms out, cracking his neck, trying to find the motivation to do literally anything else.*

*Corey heads back behind his couch toward the kitchen, to the sink and splashes some water on his face. "I'm the best fucking pro wrestler on the planet," he says to himself through gritted teeth, "I've got to show her."*