

Fires of the Fight

The Television Championship match keeps replaying in my head, every moment seared into my memory like a scar that refuses to fade. I can still hear the count, feel the finality of it, taste the bitterness as Polly's hand was raised instead of mine. I should be used to this by now, but this one cuts deeper. It wasn't just a loss—it was another nail in the coffin of a career I can't seem to resuscitate.

I sit in the corner of my living room, a half-empty glass of whiskey dangling from my fingers, the sharp burn doing nothing to dull the ache in my chest. The walls seem closer tonight, the shadows more oppressive. Losing that match wasn't just about missing out on a title—it was another reminder that maybe I've lost my edge, my place, my purpose.

The noise in my head won't stop. It's loud, relentless, picking apart every second of that match. I keep asking myself the same question: "What went wrong this time?" But I already know the answer. It's me. Something's broken inside, and I don't know how to fix it.

The fans probably forgot about it the second the next match started. Polly Pingotti moved on, her belt shining like a neon sign that screams "better luck next time." But I can't move on. I'm stuck in the loop, replaying every mistake, every moment where I came up short.

I slam the glass down on the table, the sound sharp and satisfying in the oppressive silence. My knuckles sting from the impact, a dull reminder of the table match I clawed my way out of just a week ago. I thought that win would change something, shake loose the weight pressing down on me. It didn't. It just set me up for another fall.

My reflection catches my eye in the darkened window. The man staring back at me doesn't look like a fighter anymore. He looks like a ghost, a shadow of who he used to be. The anger rises like a wave, threatening to pull me under. It's not just frustration—it's something darker, heavier.

I clench my fists, feeling the tension spread through my body. The loss wasn't just in the ring; it's in every part of me now. My confidence, my focus, my drive—it's all fractured, and I'm the one holding the hammer.

But I can't stop. Even now, with everything crumbling around me, I know I can't stop. This isn't just about wrestling anymore—it's about proving to myself that I'm still alive, still capable of fighting, of mattering.

The room feels smaller, the walls closing in as the weight of my failures presses down harder. I let out a breath I didn't realize I was holding, my jaw tight as I stare at the reflection again. Somewhere inside that hollow shell is the fighter I used to be, the man who stepped into the ring without fear, without hesitation.

The question isn't whether I'll fight again. It's whether I can survive the fight I've been waging against myself.

The whiskey burns going down, but it's not enough to drown the noise in my head. I want to feel numb, to silence the relentless churn of doubt and anger, but all it does is sharpen the edges. My body aches, my back still raw from the table match two weeks ago, but that pain feels distant compared to what's clawing at my chest.

The Television Championship match wasn't just another loss—it was a slap in the face, a reminder of how far I've fallen. I can picture it so clearly: Polly standing there, triumphant, her smug grin like a dagger twisting in my side. She held the belt high like it was her birthright, while I was left to crawl back to the shadows, empty-handed once again.

I stand abruptly, the chair scraping loudly against the floor. The room feels too small, like the walls are closing in. My fists clench at my sides, knuckles still bruised and battered. I've been here before, in this headspace that's darker than any locker room. It's suffocating, but it's familiar.

I pace the room, trying to shake the weight pressing down on me, but it only grows heavier. Every loss, every failure, every damn misstep—it's all there, piling up, threatening to crush me under its weight.

My eyes fall on the old wrestling photos lining the wall. A younger me stares back, eyes blazing with confidence, arms raised in victory. That version of Chris Lawler feels like a ghost, a relic from a time when I still believed in myself. I turn away from the photos, the sight of them like a punch to the gut.

I press my hands to the edge of the table, leaning forward as I struggle to catch my breath. My reflection in the whiskey glass stares back at me, distorted and broken. Just like me.

"I'm still here," I mutter under my breath, the words hollow, as if saying them out loud will make them true. But am I? Am I still the man who stepped into that ring ready to take on the world? Or am I just a shadow, a faded memory of who I used to be?

The anger bubbles up again, fierce and unrelenting. I slam my fist against the table, the sound reverberating through the empty room. "I'm not done yet!" I shout, my voice cracking under the weight of my emotions. But the room remains silent, unimpressed by my outburst.

The truth is, I don't know if I believe my own words. Every step forward feels like a fight against quicksand, pulling me deeper into doubt and despair. The anger is the only thing keeping me going, the fire that hasn't burned out just yet.

But how long can I keep feeding the flames before they consume me completely?

The sound of soft footsteps pulls me from my spiraling thoughts. Sarah steps into the living room, her arms folded tightly across her chest. Her eyes, tired but steady, land on me. She doesn't say anything at first, just leans against the doorway, studying me like she's trying to decide how to begin.

"You've been sitting there for hours," she says finally, her voice quiet but firm.

I don't lift my head. "Didn't realize there was a time limit."

She doesn't take the bait, walking closer until she's standing a few feet away. "You didn't even come to bed last night."

"Couldn't sleep," I mutter, staring at the shadows dancing on the floor from the dim lamp in the corner.

"Chris." Her voice sharpens, cutting through the fog in my head. "I'm not doing this with you again. You think sitting here, stewing in your misery, is going to make things better? You think it's going to fix anything?"

I snap my head up to look at her, the raw frustration bubbling over. "What do you want me to say, Sarah? That I'm fine? That I'll just shake it off and keep going like nothing's wrong? You don't think I know how much of a screw-up I've been?"

Her jaw tightens, but she doesn't back down. "That's not what I'm asking for, Chris. I'm asking you to stop shutting me out. You're not in this alone, no matter how much you're trying to be."

I let out a bitter laugh, shaking my head. "Not alone? Feels like it. Feels like every time I step into that ring, every time I come home after another failure, I'm carrying this weight by myself. You think anyone out there gives a damn about me anymore? I'm just another has-been. And now, I can't even win when it matters."

Her eyes soften, and she kneels down in front of me, resting her hands on my knees. "We give a damn about you, Chris. Me, the kids—we're still here. But you have to let us be here for you. You're not just the guy in the ring to us. You're so much more than that."

Her words hit harder than I want to admit, chipping away at the walls I've been building around myself. I lean forward, resting my elbows on my knees, my head in my hands. "I don't know how to do this anymore, Sarah. I don't know how to be the man I used to be. The man you married."

"You don't have to be that man," she says softly. "Just be here. With us. Stop trying to fight this alone."

I stay silent, the weight of her words settling over me. I don't know if I can do what she's asking, but for the first time in a long time, I feel something other than anger—a flicker of something I can't quite name.

I sit there in the silence, the weight of Sarah's words hanging in the air like a storm cloud, the tension between us thick but not unbearable. I want to argue, to push her away, but something inside me holds back. Maybe it's the exhaustion, or maybe it's the realization that she's right. I'm so damn tired of carrying all this on my own.

She doesn't move, just stays there, waiting. I can feel her eyes on me, steady and unrelenting, like she's willing me to see what she sees in me, to remember the man I used to be.

Finally, I look up, and she's still there, still holding that quiet strength. But her face... It's not just love I see in her eyes anymore. It's fear. Fear for me.

Fear that I might slip too far into this abyss and not come back.

"How do you keep fighting when everything inside you is telling you to quit?" I ask, the question slipping out before I even realize I've spoken it.

She exhales slowly, her gaze softening, and for a moment, I think she's going to say something cliché. Some pep talk about never giving up, about staying strong for the family. But instead, she surprises me with the truth.

"I don't know," she admits. "But I keep fighting. Not because it's easy, but because I love you. And I know you've still got something in you. Even if you can't see it right now, I believe in you, Chris. And I'm not going anywhere."

The words hit harder than anything I've ever heard in the ring. The weight of her faith in me—it feels like a chain, a tether pulling me back from the edge. But even as it comforts me, it stings. Because I don't feel like the man she believes I am.

I don't feel like the man anyone believes I am.

But the question lingers. How do I keep fighting when I feel like I've got nothing left? How do I step back into that ring after the mess I've made of everything?

Sarah watches me, waiting, and I know she's hoping for something more than the silence that's eating away at me. But the truth is... I don't have an answer.

"I'm not sure I can keep doing this," I say finally, my voice low, hoarse. The weight of the words is crushing, but I can't pretend anymore. "I don't know if I'm strong enough. Not just for me, but for you. For us."

She leans in, her hand reaching for mine, warm and steady. “You don’t have to have it all figured out right now. Just... don’t give up on us. Don’t give up on you.”

Her words are a lifeline, but I’m not sure I’m ready to grab onto it. I sit there, staring at our intertwined hands, unsure of what comes next.

But I know one thing for sure—if I’m going to keep fighting, it’s not for the fans, not for the titles. It’s for her. For my family. Because even if I can’t remember who I was, maybe, just maybe, I can figure out who I need to be.

The house is quiet now, save for the creak of the floorboards beneath my feet as I pace. Sarah’s words still hang in the air, mixing with my own frustrations, doubts, and the lingering sting of losing the SCW Television Championship opportunity. I’ve always been good at carrying pain, but lately, it feels heavier—like it’s digging in deeper with every step I take.

I pause by the window, looking out at the street. The soft glow of a streetlamp casts long shadows, and for a moment, I feel like one of them. Fading. Stretched too thin.

My hand brushes against my lower back, and I wince. The pain from the table spot with Rayne Young has been worse than I let on. It’s not just a dull ache anymore—it’s sharp, biting, a reminder of everything I’ve been through. Of every failure.

I ease back into the chair, the one spot in this house where I feel like I can just stop moving, stop fighting—if only for a minute. But even now, sitting here, I can’t escape the thoughts.

The loss to Polly Pingotti eats at me. Not because I underestimated her—I didn’t. She’s the champion for a reason. But it felt like another brick in the wall I’ve been trying to tear down since the moment I came back.

How many times can a man lose before he breaks?

I tilt my head back, closing my eyes, and for a moment, I let myself sink into the weight of it all. The noise of the crowd, the lights, the referee’s hand hitting the mat—it all plays on a loop in my mind.

Then, another thought breaks through the haze, uninvited but unavoidable: Asher Hayes.

The name alone feels heavy, like a shadow creeping into the room. Asher Hayes, the man whose name commands respect. A former world champion. The kind of competitor who’s already achieved everything I’ve spent my life chasing.

I open my eyes and stare at the ceiling, my chest tightening. How do you stand across from a man like Hayes when you feel like your foundation is already crumbling beneath you?

But then, a different thought cuts through the doubt, sharp and unrelenting. Hayes might be a giant in this business, but he's still just a man. And men can fall.