

A cacophony of chatter buzzed throughout the crowded convention hall. Bodies pressed together in the huddled masses, painting a colorful mosaic of wrestling tees, shiny replica title belts, and dazzling cosplays of fan-favorite wrestlers. Booths filled the space, and wrestling aficionados lined up at the shrine of their favorite wrestlers. Legends were in attendance, making a buck off the autograph, trying to make ends meet. The convention was invited to attract the more hardcore crowd. Flashes abruptly cast the convention hall in bright outbursts as wrestlers took their photographs alongside fans. The fans shone with excitement while they clutched their prized wrestling memorabilia.

A wrestling convention wasn't a place Xander would typically find himself. Xander didn't attend the event for his sake. In fact, he was a guest. His appearance didn't go unnoticed as fans attempted to get his autographs. He politely declined. Xander didn't want to take away from the business that the attending wrestlers counted on. Some fans accepted the rejection gracefully; others muttered curses towards Xander before stomping away. Xander didn't care either way. He didn't let fan opinion bother him. He never catered to the fickle audience. They rooted for him, or they didn't. He focused on what he had to do to score victories in the ring. SCW can do whatever they had to in order to make money off his image. His merchandise sold consistently, meaning his cut came in steady. He didn't top the charts on ShopSCW.com. He typically hovered around the tenth spot. That was fine with him.

To his right, Trinity hummed with intrigue. She immersed herself in the energy of the convention. Trinity adorned one of her father's vintage t-shirts. Xander never asked how she stumbled across something SCW sold almost two decades ago. Ebay maybe? He found her gesture flattering, to say the least, but didn't verbalize the sentiment. Xander smiled at his daughter's tribute.

They were here upon Trinity's suggestion as she wanted to experience a convention. Xander thought the trip would have been an excellent way to introduce her to the other aspects of being a professional wrestler. Soon, she would be ready to enter this world on her own. He planned on forcing her to make her own way on the independents instead of asking CHBK to hire her right out of the gates. Since indie wrestlers didn't make good money, fan conventions helped alleviate some of the pain. He went through the gauntlet and came out the other end as a better wrestler. Xander believed Trinity would, too.

Trinity drifted towards the convention's hall centerpiece, a makeshift ring that featured matches throughout the day. Two young women were currently battling. The bumps thumped the ring, the thuds echoing off the walls. They shouted at each other with competing grunts. Trinity observed. Xander turned as a hand clamped down on his shoulder. To his dismay, Adam Allocco stood behind him. The man donned a three-piece suit, looking like he came to work at the New York Stock Exchange instead of a wrestling convention. His tuft of smoky hair rose from the man's round face. Adam harbored a shit-eating grin on his punchable face. Oh, how Xander wanted to punch that face. He restrained himself from that impulse. Adam's arm wrapped around Xander like friends, not arch-enemies.

"Look at you, big guy. Look at you."

"What the hell do you want?" **Xander asked. Xander watched as Adam's view hovered over his daughter. Anger seeped into Xander's being. He knew the type of character Allocco was. He had a poor reputation as a womanizer. If the man tried to make a pass at Trinity, Xander would choke him out. He didn't care about the consequences.**

"What's with the hostile attitude? After all we've been through, I thought we could come to some understanding. Haven't I earned your respect at all?" **Adam said. Xander choked on his laughter at the remark. Respect him? That day would never come to fruition. Adam screwed Xander out of his Olympic dreams, derailing his boxing career in the process. Xander trusted him as pupils tended to rely on their mentors. Adam betrayed that bond for selfish purposes, teaching Xander how much of a dog-eat-dog world professional wrestling was.**

"Not a chance. If you excuse me, I'm trying to spend a day out with my daughter."

"What a touching story that is. It moved me to hear that you were reunited with your estranged daughter."

"Watch your tongue."

"Can you hear the sincerity in my voice? I'm happy that you're able to enjoy fatherhood. I know you and Connor never saw eye-to-eye. They might say blood is thicker than water, but sometimes, you're just incompatible. Look at me, for example. I get along great with Ali and V, but the other shit--- we don't even exchange holiday cards," **Adam said. As usual, Xander realized that Adam enjoyed the sound of his voice. Was this some attempt to bond? There was no hope of reconciliation; the sooner he could abandon Adam and his attempts at small talk, the better.**

"We're not friends, Adam. We never will be. So why are we talking?"

"I know I've wronged you. Aren't you satisfied with your revenge? You ruined my title run. Isn't that enough to sate your thirst? You don't see me acting bitter towards you. I forgive you. So why can't you forgive me?" **Adam asked. He stepped in front of Xander now. The smile didn't fade. Xander enjoyed taking the SCW World Championship from Adam. That was a highlight of his life. Yes, he did have a measure of revenge, but that wasn't enough for Xander to forgive the man for his crimes. He would never forgive him.**

"I can't. You're an asshole. I don't like you. Therefore, I won't ever forgive you."

"That's a shame."

"It is what it is. You need to learn to accept that you're an unpopular dude."

"I came over here to play nice. I wanted to tell you how lovely your daughter is. She reminds me of a stripper I used to bang. To think that the monstrous Xander Valentine could produce a looker, it's baffling," **Adam said. Adam assessed her once more with eager eyes. Xander gripped Adam's shoulder now. He pressed his fingers into the flesh. That was his warning shot. Adam panicked under the pain of his grasp. Xander released his hold. Adam stepped back and coughed out a snicker.** "Calm down, big guy. I would never dare cross that line. I respect you too much to partake. Besides, she is too young for me."

"Is there such a thing as too young for you?"

"Hey, look! Maybe a few years ago, I would consider such a conquest. I might have been as bold to risk your wrath. But I've smartened up and matured. I'm a humble man now. Partly thanks to your doing," **Adam answered. A crowd started to form around them. Xander's actions created a commotion as nearby fans observed his aggression toward his former mentor.**

"Well, I'm honored. Now go away."

"There's actually a reason why I wanted to speak to you."

"What now? Can't you tell I'm not interested?"

"It's about your daughter."

"Careful. You're tiptoeing a dangerous line," **Xander warned. Adam Allocco went to speak, raising his finger in protest; however, wisely perhaps, he closed his mouth. Adam eyed Trinity one more time before shrugging. Without another word, he shoved his hands into his pockets and pushed past the crowd, casually strolling away. Not a minute later, Trinity entered the vacated space. She gave Adam a weird look before turning towards his father.**

"What was that all about?"

"Some advice, Trinity. Be careful about who you trust. There are certain people who you want to steer away from. And that man right there is one of them," **Xander explained. He glared daggers in Adam's back. Eventually, he left Xander's view and disappeared into the crowd. Trinity stepped up next to her father and looked up at him with a concerned face.**

"What did he want?"

"He said he wanted to discuss you."

"Me?"

"He is always on the lookout for the next young star to leach off. That's been his MO from day one. Find someone with high potential and ride their coattails. When it's no longer convenient,

dump them and find a new workhorse. Rinse and repeat," **Xander said. That was his theory. He would bet a hundred that Adam wanted to offer to take over Trinity's training. Xander refused to let Adam get close to his daughter. Regardless of what he might have said to Xander's face, he probably plotted a devious scheme. Xander planned on protecting his daughter from the likes of Adam.**

"Yet he trained you. He did a good job."

"He's one of the best trainers. I won't deny that. Also taught me some tough life lessons."

"But you wouldn't recommend his services."

"No way. You're going to find out there are promoters and others like Adam who are only out for their benefit. They seek to use you. You have to be vigilant. There are a lot of snake oil salesmen in this industry, and the only one you can trust is yourself," **Xander said. This is why he has ridden solo for the majority of his career. Except for New Blood Rebellion, he never was part of a fraction. He learned that every ally eventually turned on you and became your enemy. He wished this business wasn't so cutthroat; however, that was just how it was. Xander was okay with it. If anything, such a worldview made things much simpler for him to operate.**

"I can trust you, right?" **Trinity asked.**

"You can trust me. Not only because I'm your father but because we're never going to be at odds over our goals."

"You say that."

"By the time you reach my level, I'll already be gone. Besides, you're part of my legacy. Your success in this sport will be the next phase of my career. My time is limited. The end is near. But for you, you are only getting started, and the world's your oyster," **Xander explained. He wondered how true he could remain to his words if their paths did cross. He saw father and son fight before. Xander imagined the father believed he would never come to blows with his son in a wrestling ring. But it happened. Only fate would tell if there would be a time when Trinity and Xander stood in opposite corners; however, Xander highly doubted that would ever be the case. Would he sacrifice his prosperity for her sake? He might. And every day that passed in which they trained together, strengthening their bond, Xander came one step closer to passing her his mantle.**

"I trust you. And I am lucky to have you watching over me."

"It's my solemn duty. Always know that I will have your back."

Where is the arrogance?

Where has that vanity that once defined Glory Braddock gone?

What could have caused such a drastic change in her?

I almost didn't recognize you, Glory. Has life humbled you? People change. They develop, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. I fear it could be the latter. On my winding road back to the SCW World Championship, SCW chose you to be my last stop potentially. You could be a speed bump, a sudden stop in my momentum as I try to knock off one of SCW's most successful wrestlers ever. You could also be an accelerant, a boost, the shot of adrenaline I need to take me to the next level. All at the same time, I will be looking aside at my rival Selena. I will watch her as she finds herself in a similar situation against the SCW Adrenaline Champion.

Can I keep up with the Joneses? Can I match Selena? I do not doubt that, in Breakdown, she will answer the challenge SCW had laid before her. As good as she might be, Bree Lancaster will come up short against Selena. Why? Because Selena Frost is that good. I know that. It's not faith. It's the trust I have in her abilities. She powers through to victory with sheer will. I've tasted bitter defeats at her hand. So, the burden falls on me now. So I ask again, can I match Selena? Can I handle business this week against you, Glory? Can I score a decisive victory like I did the last time we met in the ring? I need to. I can't slow down. I can't stumble. I need to be at the top of my game come Taking Hold of the Flame because if I'm not, I won't realize my dream of becoming SCW World Champion again.

You're a test, and everyone's watching. You've done it all—well, almost everything. You are a Supreme Champion, doing it in quick succession and proving that you really are an upstart in SCW's hierarchy. I can't boast of such a feat. I've existed in a box. I never sniffed the Adrenaline Championship. And we all know I'm not a team player, so I haven't even gone near the SCW Tag Team Championship. You can say you accomplished things that I, a SCW Hall of Famer, haven't. Your resume is impressive. So, to come out and try to discredit you ultimately will be a fool's errand. And if there is anything I am not, I'm not an idiot. I recognize that you have talent.

Greatness recognizes greatness. Something like that, right?

If you wanted to be, you could be the future of this company. My time's limited. The minute hand is ticking towards midnight. The lights are about to go out on my career. And in front of you is an opportunity to take the helm and commandeer this ship. But not with this newfound humble attitude. You're no longer hungry. When we last faced, you were rabid as a British bulldog, one pugnacious bitch. Your arrogance knew no boundaries, but that was part of an identity that made you dangerous every time that bell rang. Where has that intensity gone? Why have you decided to forsake what made you strong for whatever--- for whatever this neutered shell of your former self?

Glory Braddock wouldn't be satisfied with being strapped with a mid-card status. Glory Braddock would have thought the main event or bust. Glory Braddock wouldn't settle for the tag team division. It would have been all about individual acclaim, not some collective bullshit. You can't

tell me that is where you want to be with your career. You're underachieving. You won the SCW World Championship. Now, what are you doing with cannon fodder? You're better than this. While your run as the apex predator might have been shortlived, you must believe you could run it back. The old Glory wouldn't step back. She wouldn't have pumped the brakes. Now, she would have gone full fucking throttle.

I'm not seeing that speed out of you. You're not in top gear. But then you're telling me you're coming at me like a freight train, full-steam ahead. What a joke. The Glory Braddock that I defeated might have been delusional. But she charged forward regardless of what awaited her. It wasn't her arrogance that failed you, but your body. You didn't make any mistakes that evening. I ensnared you in the Fade to Black. I choked you out. The blood stopped flowing to your head. There isn't any shame in that. You pretend you could have done something about it. You couldn't. The moment I locked in that hold tight, there wasn't any escape. The result was inevitable. And while you have chastised the officiating, if they waited any longer, you would have had brain damage or worse. Stop being stupid and think about it. Wouldn't you rather live to fight another day than die on that hill?

You're an idiot.

It would be best if you accepted the fact that you were simply another one of my victims. The list is long, Glory. You witnessed what I am capable of doing in the ring. When that bell is rung, I go to war. I have chopped down the mightiest. I have dominated the best. I have conquered, time after time. This week on Breakdown will be no different. It's inevitable. Just like how death awaits us all, the Executioner ends whoever is placed in front of his path. You're not special, Glory. Your ego might lie to you. That delusion might be what allows you to enter that ring to face me; however, it will not save you from that cruel fate. Nothing is going to stop me from hoisting your limp body onto my shoulder and driving you into the canvas for the one--- two--- three.

You might accuse me of overlooking you, but I'm not. I'm staring right at you. As I said, I recognize your abilities. Are you going to be an opponent that I can quickly push over? No chance in hell. You're prey worthy of the hunt. I'm a big game hunter aiming with his rifle. You will go on my wall and join my other trophies. Another face in my crowd of victories. But more importantly, you will be a warning shot for Selena. A storm is on the horizon. A bloody tempest is roaring her way. She better heed the warning sirens and take shelter, for my arrival means her demise.

Selena can close her eyes during our match. She's good at sticking her head in the sand. But your defeat will force those scared eyes to open. I'm that light at the end of the tunnel. And while I have said my time is limited, and my life expectancy is short, I will use every minute I have left to live out my purpose. That sense of mortality is what makes me dangerous. I know how precious each opportunity is. Be it this week against you, Glory, with my chance to prove that I am still a monster in the ring. Be at Taking Hold of the Flame when I confront Selena with her memento mori.

I know there will be a time soon when I can only look back, when my body has failed me for the last time, when I have no choice but to hang up my boots. But I refuse to add any more regrets. I won't let you defeat me, Glory. I take satisfaction in knowing that this match means redemption to you. I enjoy that I'm in your consciousness, holding a win over your head. That makes me feel important to you. It's what you would call validation. Selena should learn from you in that aspect. And since you've embarked on this endeavor to right that supposed wrong, I'm here to deny you. Because last time will be the same this time, the natural order of things is that I am your superior. In that ring, I am your master.

I won't let that go.

I won't let you take that from my hands.

We're set on this collision course. Our minds are set. Our eyes are locked. You and I are going to meet on Breakdown. Our clash is going to send shockwaves through the company. Selena is going to watch and learn. And if she's smart, she will take heed of my warning. I'm going to give her a preview of what's to come. And Glory, you'll make an excellent stand-in for the champion herself.

Fade to black.