

Interlude

A ghostly chorus of voices from the throng resounded in the recesses of her consciousness. The ring had been her universe only hours before, a platform for victory and a battleground for glory. This evening served as a furnace where dreams were put to the ultimate test. Redeeming herself and getting back the crown that used to fit her so well was what Rise to Greatness XXI had promised. Rather, it had brought defeat—a sharp, painful warning that even heroes might err.

The "Lost Monarch," Ryan Lecavalier, sat in her hotel room's dark light, the weight of the battle's aftermath heavy on her shoulders. Her body hurt, every cut and bruise a reminder of the battle she had fought. Once a delicious concoction of work and achievement, the sting of sweat and tears now tasted like salt on a wound.

The ache that tore at her was more than simply bodily. It was the utter hush that came after, the empty space where the cries and applause had been. It was eight years ago, when she had first stepped away from the ring, that she had heard that hush. It had been a self-imposed exile, a jail of her own design, back then, to get away from the emptiness that had started to eat away at her spirit. The hush was different today, though. It served as a reminder of the outstanding matters she still needed to resolve.

This was not an unexpected loss; rather, it hurt because of what it stood for. Watching to see if the Lost Monarch might indeed rise again was the entire planet. She had also made a mistake tonight. Something inside her, nevertheless, refused to die even in the face of that disappointment. Even after it had been banked for a while, the fire continued to burn. It was not done, not quite.

Ryan's eyes lingered on the open Supreme Championship Wrestling contract that was placed in front of her. The promise she made to herself, as well as to the promotion, had long since dried in the ink. There was a purpose for her return. Even after the loss, that rationale remained the same.

With her muscles tensing up, she carefully got to her feet and headed to the restroom. The woman in the mirror had gone through hell, yet there was still a ray of light of resolve in those angry, stubborn eyes. She was not finished. Not by a long stretch. She was prepared to walk, crawl, or even fight her way down the longer and more difficult route that led back to the summit.

The world would hear her voice once more the next day. She had consented to a podcast interview, an opportunity to speak with supporters, detractors, and doubters. They would anticipate a statement of defeat from her, one that acknowledged the Lost Monarch's true loss. But Ryan had never been one to follow rules or specifications.

She allowed herself a little, gloomy smile as she bent forward and splattered cold water all over her face. They would see before long. Her narrative did not stop here. This was only the start of the following section. The Lost Monarch had fallen this evening, but she would rise again, more formidable, astute, and powerful than before.

It was far from over in the matches that followed. Furthermore, Ryan Lecavalier was far from over.

The Show Must Go On

The Ringside Banter theme music subsided as the hosts, Mike "Maverick" Matthews and Jack "The Hammer" Harrington, took their seats and smiled broadly as usual. There was an air of tension in the room, which was filled with championship belts and wrestling memorabilia, but Ryan Lecavalier, the "Lost Monarch," was not renowned for playing nice.

Sitting opposite them in her chair, Ryan gave off an air of assurance that verged on conceit. Her eyes were hard and calculated, yet her face was impenetrable. She wore a sleek black leather jacket over a tight blouse. Her demeanor remained sharp despite her pride being bruised by the defeat at Rise to Greatness XXI.

"Hey, Ryan," Jack said in a fake-warm voice, "it's lovely to have you on the program! I have to admit, the match at Rise to Greatness was a tough break. "How do you feel?"

A faint smile appeared on Ryan's face, but it stayed hidden. "Jack, I'm doing just well. Without a doubt, it was a difficult match. However, I've experienced worse."

With a patronizing grin pulling at the corner of his mouth, Maverick leaned back. "Well said, Ryan. However, some may argue that the "Lost Monarch" is really lost, true to her name. Are you nearly forty years old? Isn't it time to consider putting those boots away?"

Ryan's smile tightened, but she said in a calm voice. "I'm 39, Maverick. That may sound like a lot in wrestling years, even if I'm not as adequate as most people half my age. Due to my age or my inflammatory conditions, I have previously been questioned by others. But as everyone who has followed my career knows, I never back down from a challenge. Being older is a strength, not a real issue. And I'm the best at using it."

Jack seemed to dismiss her remarks with a laugh. "Alright, fair enough. However, you have to acknowledge that it must be hard on the body, right? You've had shoulder problems, knee operations, and let's not even talk about the psychological toll. How do you manage to persevere?"

Despite her growing impatience, Ryan took a deep breath and maintained her poise. "I have indeed experienced a lot of hardship." There is a significant bodily cost. There's no disputing that my body has transformed. However, I've adjusted. I've worked out more intelligently than harder. Regarding the psychological aspect, well, it's a daily struggle. If you're not careful, this industry has the potential to eat you up and spit you out. However, I've discovered that what really counts are the supporters who have faith in me and my love for this sport."

Clearly amused, Maverick lifted an eyebrow. "Passion, really? Speaking of passion, this Friday marks the return of Breakdown. Baby, it's Dallas, Texas! There will be a lot of people at the American Airlines Center. What is to be anticipated from the "Lost Monarch"? Another Loss?"

Ryan's smirk widened, venom dripping from her words. "You can expect me to walk into that arena and remind everyone exactly why I'm the 'Lost Monarch.' And believe me, I haven't lost my edge. If anything, that match at Rise to Greatness has only made me hungrier. I'm not showing up to make friends or play nice. I'm coming to destroy whoever is unfortunate enough to stand across from me."

Jack leaned in, his grin returning as he tried to lighten the mood again. "So, no plans for retirement yet? Not even a little itch to try something... safer?"

Ryan's eyes narrowed, her voice dropping to a menacing whisper. "Retirement? You think I'm done? I'm just getting started. And let's get something straight—I decide when I'm done, not you, not the fans, and certainly not some overpaid pencil-pusher sitting in an office. I'm here to do one thing, and that's to prove that I'm the best, single most talented athlete in SCW."

Feeling the boiling wrath underneath her composed exterior, Maverick cleared his throat. As always, Ryan, it's been rather illuminating. "Everybody is excited about Breakdown on Friday. Before we end this, is there anything else you would want to mention?"

With her eyes penetrating through both guys, Ryan leaned forward. "To those who have doubts about me, don't stop. To those who believe my work is done: never lose hope. I'm going to remind everyone in that arena on Friday as well as those watching at home why Ryan Lecavalier is a household name worldwide."

Ryan got up without waiting for a reply, making a quick and authoritative leave. She entered the arena with the same authority and left the studio without making small talk. With a resounding click, the

door shut behind her, dispelling Jack and Maverick's prior arrogance as they stared after her.

"Man," Jack muttered, his grin finally fading. "She's scary."

"Yeah," Maverick agreed, shaking his head slowly. "And she's far from done. God help whoever's in her way on Friday."

"Man." Jack smirked and rubbed the back of his neck, saying, "She still has it,"

"Of course.", Maverick nodded softly in agreement. "She hasn't finished yet. Not in the slightest."

Give Em' Hell Kid (Part II)

With a persistent smile, Ryan left the store and adjusted the strap of her duffel bag. The officer's companion, a tall, broad-shouldered guy with a severe yet fatigued countenance, reached her before she could finish exhaling the crisp night air. His attire appeared to compress his body, a testament to his extended workdays and lack of sleep.

"Ma'am, everything okay?" With a tinge of mistrust in his voice, as though the event in the store had disturbed him more than he was willing to admit, he inquired.

With a slight inclination of her head, Ryan's smile turned into a more surprising and lighthearted one. She said, her voice honeyed with a hint of innocence, "Oh, just a bit of excitement." she smirks, "Surely boys will be boys? Nothing bad happened."

With a hesitant nod, the officer looked at her for a while longer, as if he was trying to find anything beyond her easy going demeanor. He

eventually moved aside, letting her carry on with her journey, looking satisfied or maybe simply too exhausted to push any more.

Ryan moved in the direction of her vehicle, a beautiful 1967 Lamborghini Miura in midnight black with polished chrome that sparkled in the streetlights. Before getting inside the opulent car, she performed a small gesture of respect by running her palm down the hood. The unexpected thump of something heavy on the passenger window shocked her as she attempted to turn the key.

Slamming against the glass, his breath coming in frantic gasps, was a young guy with dark complexion and sharp features that appeared to blur in the low light. His voice shaking with agitation, he managed to gasp out, "I've been looking all around for you!" Her pulse thumping with a mix of astonishment and interest, Ryan Rolled down the window.

He nearly collapsed before she could reply, his words hanging there like an unanswered inquiry.

Afterword

They believe I'm done, then. They believe I'm washed up. They view me as simply another statistic, another somebody who has fallen short of greatness. Folks, let me tell you something: they have another project in the works. Since I'm Ryan and I'm not simply returning. I'm at my best now.

Do you recall Rise to Greatness? Yes, the one in which I failed. You do, I am sure of it. Everybody does. However, I must admit that that loss was like a fire under my ass. It kindled a spark inside of me that is now more intense than it has ever been. I've been training more diligently and challenging myself more than I ever imagined. Every

move, every tactic, every weakness of my opponent has been the subject of my research, analysis, and obsession.

Furthermore, on Breakdown, who is my opponent? Matthew Knox - The Raven. An enigmatic individual with a name rooted in tradition. They call him an omen of doom, a morally corrupt power. They claim that he is an unstoppable force of nature. It's important for everyone to know that ravens are scavengers. They consume the frail and the dying. However, they are afraid of light. The sun terrifies them.

And I, Ryan, am the Sun. I am the light that will shine through the shadows. I am the power that will lift the Raven's curse. It's me who will exit Breakdown with a confident demeanor, full of hopes for more championships.

I've heard the dissenting voices. They claim that I'm not worthy, talented, or tough enough. I'm here to inform you that I am all that you could possibly want and more. I'm a combatant. I've made it through. I'm victorious. And nobody is going to get in my way—especially not a washed-up raven.

So, if you're listening, Matthew Knox, let this serve as a warning. I am on my way to you. I'm going to take away everything from you, even your cute moniker and aura of mystery. And at the end of it all, you'll be reduced to the status of a featherless bird from a bygone era.

It's more than just a contest to be won. It's my goal to establish my worth. My goal is to demonstrate to the world that I am worthy of being at the top. Regaining my identity is the goal of this. And I can assure you that when I leave Breakdown, I'll be one step closer to climbing the mountain rather than merely being "The Lost Monarch."