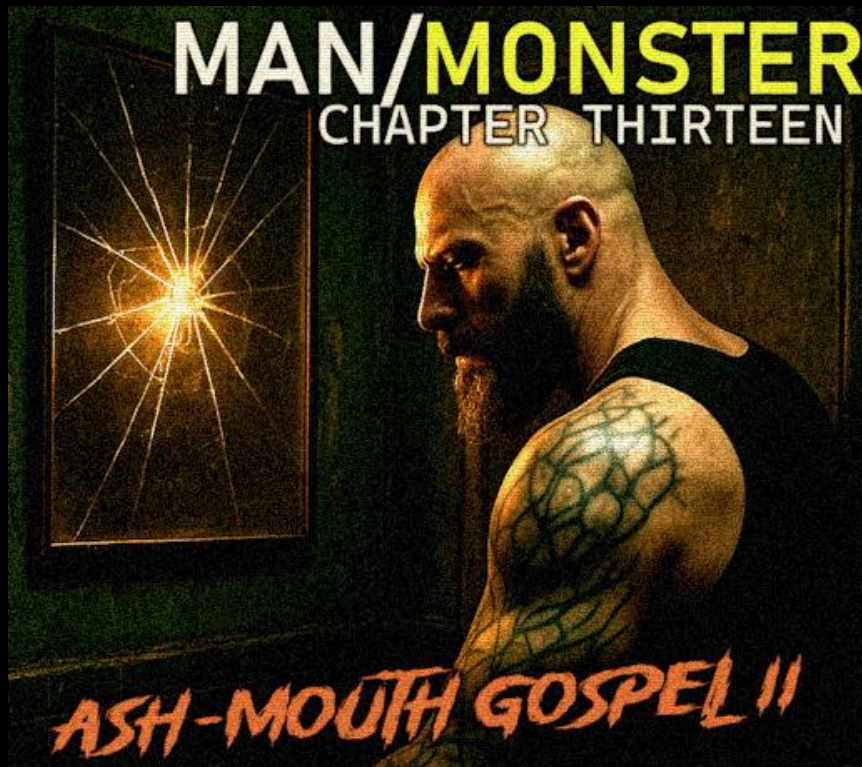




SOMEWHERE NEAR MIAMI, FL

JUNE 24, 2025

(OFF CAMERA)

The motel wasn't on any travel website—another dilapidated shithole reeking of mildew and neglect. This was the kind of place no one stopped at on purpose. Off the beaten path. Surrounded by overgrown mangroves and *teeming* with *local wildlife*. He was supposed to have a luxury suite with a view down at the Ritz in Coconut Grove. Sev Yurievich hadn't checked in. Hadn't even called to cancel—inconsiderate, cheap, *heel shit*. It was getting easier to slough off that layer of human decency. The cuts and contusions helped. If only he could peel back the scar tissue, the layers of damage as easily. He knew that was a pointless wish, even if he had a portrait stashed in his attic to collect all the damage, it would still be tattooed on his soul, his psyche—his *skin*.

The congenial email about his swanky accommodations from eWo offices had been swiped left, *deleted* in an instant and it wasn't that he was looking a gift horse signing bonus in the mouth. eWo *wanted* his name. Wanted the ENIGMA from that year-long undefeated streak—the butt of every locker room joke. Biggest fish. *Shittiest pond*.

The moment his plane touched down on the tarmac at Miami International, he'd given himself over to the hands of fate, renting a car and driving aimlessly until the gas was about to run out. It was montage-worthy, really. A few clicks out of town, away from all the tanned flesh, tits and ass, he'd started to breathe easier. He'd stopped for cigarettes at the last gas station and had forgotten to fill up the tank. Deliberately. The Ritz felt like another albatross, another gimme like that championship in iiW that had apparently been created just to keep him distracted. Fucking ghosts. Insubstantial. Halfway out the door already, going through the motions to collect another payday. No substance. Midcard hell. None of them had *teeth*.

He'd ended up here, drawn not by accident, but by *gravity*. Places like this drew him in, almost subliminally.

Like calls to like.

No explanations, no side-eye. They didn't expect anything but *discretion* and a payment in cash. Nobody looked too hard. In places like this, he felt less *exposed*. Less like a fraud. Less like a god trying to remember how to be human.

Inside, the hum of an old air conditioner did nothing to touch the humidity that clung to the walls, making the paint look like it had been slathered in cheap lube. Everything felt damp. The sheets clung like moldy bandages, and the mattress held the sickly weight of air too thick to breathe. A cooler full of ice sat beside the bed, its contents melting faster than he could use them. He pulled a Ziploc bag from within, half-filled with cloudy cubes, and pressed it to the back of his neck. It helped, briefly. Then the water began to run.

Roaches skittered across the floor, their fat bodies glistening in the low light. Sev saw them—watched one crawl over his boot—and didn't move. There was something in their persistence he understood. Something familiar. He didn't flinch. He couldn't. It felt... *wrong*. Like betraying kin.

He could afford better. The bookings were good enough. eWo had already paid for a luxury suite, a few floors down from the rooftop pool—he could have gone for that right about now. Flop his half-broken carcass on a raft and just bake until the sun went down. He knew that wasn't going to happen. Not now. There would be *fans*. Vultures. Critics. So many assholes with no sense of boundaries, poking and prodding and hounding until he was bled dry. This was better. This kind of place didn't ask questions. Didn't force him to play the part. Here, in the quiet rot, he could stop pretending the spiral hadn't taken more from him than he could name. Here, he could *bleed* without scrutiny.

His body ached in layers—some fresh, some fossilized. Wrists wrapped tight from old breaks. Ribs that never quite healed right. A spine worn down like a relic, vertebrae grinding against time. His right knee throbbed from where Dickie had spiked him into the apron. His shoulder was still decorated in muted greens and yellows from the aftermath of the match with Polly, the discoloring halfway camouflaged by the tattooed veins. His *back*—it sang in pulses of fire, every tendon a page in a book no one would ever finish reading. Scar tissue layered like sediment. The grave of retirement yawning at his heels.

Twenty-nine years in this business. Enough time to forget how many times he'd taped the same wrist, iced the same joint, buried the same *guilt*. He had outlasted most men and buried more than a few. He hadn't thought of PYRO in over a year—of that damned closure he'd never get now, not after what he'd done. Not after his own fucking cowardice.

"Fuck you, Pyotr," he muttered, the bitterness bubbling up his throat like bile.

He craved a cigarette, hands shaking as he patted himself down, looking for that misplaced pack.

He was rotting with it. Thinking about the damned roaches and how survival came with a cost no matter how big you got. The matches weren't what ruined you. Fuck no. It was the years between them. The waiting. The walking. The press junkets and fan expos and being on 24-7 while the rest of the world was going to shit. He'd considered the wrestling business a career before now, that ultimate goal of being on the marquee, being on a poster, a billboard—headlining an internationally broadcast Pay-Per-View surpassed over and over again. The whole time, he was oblivious to the machinations.

And now? Knowing that the spiral was never going to be finished using him was too heavy to bear. He felt every second of it—stacked in layers of regret and nerve pain, phantom aches and very real bruises.

He sat on the edge of the bed, his massive frame hunched, one hand braced on his aching knee, the other slowly dragging a black-streaked washcloth across his face. The war paint came away in smears, diluted by sweat and something darker.

The TV was off. The lights were dim. The Codex lay open on the nightstand. In the flickering lamplight, its pages shimmered faintly—words phasing in and out like breath on glass, as though the prophecy itself hadn't yet decided how this story ends. The ink seemed alive—uncertain, as restless as he was. A gospel unfinished.

Maybe that was why he was still here, in a room that smelled like rot and regret and resignation.

A knock echoed.

Soft. Subtle.

From the bathroom door. Not the hallway. *Inside.*

He didn't move at first.

A dribble of cold water rolled down his back from the bag still balanced on the back of his neck. As if echoing that, he heard something dripping *somewhere* else. In the walls. From the air conditioner. He didn't want to look.

"Go away."

He kept his eyes on the carpet, contemplating the scuffs on the toes of his boots like they hadn't already been beaten to shit when he'd found them in that old Army Surplus store. The secrets of the universe hiding in the yellowed stripes where the black polish had been gouged out.

The knock came again.

Definitely in the bathroom.

Absolutely going to continue to be ignored.

He picked up the mickey of cheap vodka, finally breaking the seal. He closed his eyes, bent his elbow and put it to his lips. Once that astringent-*nothing*-fire slid down his throat, he felt it fall away. The veil. The semblance of a stable and solid reality. He could hear it now. Scratching in the walls. Or maybe inside his head, in those empty spaces where the MONSTER MACHINE used to live. He tilted the flask again, taking another pull because once it was loose, it was better to just see it through to the end—like tangling with a rabid dog.

Despite the protestations of his knees at the shift in pressure, Sev stood up. The baggie fell and burst open against the corner of the bed, soaking the already-moist carpet. He took another gulp of magic potato juice, feeling the ache in his back and knees get a little further away. He swayed just a little, not intoxicated yet but rather lightheaded and in the static that paraded across his vision, he thought he saw that spiral turning.

He crossed the threadbare carpet in two slow steps. He touched the doorknob with the edge of his knuckle and the spots cleared.

The door creaked open.

The mirror above the sink was cracked—a spiderweb of fractures radiating from the center like an open eye... or a target. He leaned in slowly, expecting only his reflection.

But there was light behind the glass. Fluorescent and flickering—*institutional* white. And through that phantom doorway, he saw her.

Polly Pingotti.

Not as she was, bloodied and beaten. Not as she was later, defiant and angry. As she would be soon—*lost in the spiral*.

She stood inside the mirror-world, back turned, arms limp at her sides. Blood ringed her mouth. Dripped from her torn fingertips. Her head twitched slightly, as if she was listening to something he couldn't hear.

"He draws the doors now, Mama..." Lenore's voice echoed in his skull, *distantly*, like a half-remembered dream.

"Polly," Sev rasped, reaching toward the glass.

His hand pressed flat against the mirror. Cold. Solid. Slivers of glass snagging his callused palm.

The TV behind him screeched into static. Without the remote, it changed channels. A flicker. A glitch. Then—

"KABLAIAAAAAAAAAAAM!"

Derek Adonis, gaudy and bloated, danced across the screen in a mockery of holy ecstasy. The image was warped, stretched. The cloud he rode looked more like a tumour. His eyes glowed like static ulcers.

The spiral etched itself over the screen in flickering pulses.

Sev turned away, jaw clenched. His fingers curled tight around the cloth in his hand.

It dripped. Not sweat. Not paint.

Blood.

Dickie's, maybe? Ken's, certainly. Polly's? Probably.

Nope. This was too *fresh*. Too *much*. Too **red**.

It was **his**.

There was a shard of glass wedged in deep between his first and second knuckles. More all over the floor and in the chipped sink—mirror smashed to bits by his own hand?

The ash-smeared cloth dropped to the floor. The Codex pages rustled without wind. In the jagged glass still clinging to the frame, the door remained—unchanged.

Open.

Hungry.

Patient.

The lighting is blown out. Overexposed. Too bright, bleaching the baby blue tiles on the wall to a sickly yellow-green. The motel mirror is gone—replaced by a warped, spiraling backdrop of static and fire. ENIGMA steps forward from shadow, bare-chested, blood still staining his chest, black ash smudged beneath his eyes like warpaint resurrected.

"g l pja."

The word hangs there for a second. Foreign. Alien.

“You’re not supposed to understand it.
It’s a word older than the sound your tongue can make.
A word that means: the last thing you hear before the scream starts.

I whisper it into blood.
Carve it into the mouths of prophets.
And now it’s yours, Derek.”

He can’t keep the bitterness from creeping in.

“Ten more seconds on your fifteen minutes of fame.
Not because you’re *worthy*.
Because you’re *convenient*.”

*He clenches his fist slowly, liquid trickling between his
fingers—oversaturated—ruby red.*

“You prance around with your tanned tits and your cum jokes and your
pork-slicked throne of delusion, thinking this business owes you something.
Like you fucked your way into *divinity*.
Like pleasure means power.
Like KABLAMia was ever more than a *masturbatory fantasy* given a booking fee.

You talk about adrenaline like you invented it.
But you’ve never felt the rush of a man *breaking* in your arms because he
believed you were a god.
You’ve never stood in the aftermath of prophecy, shaking from the violence it
*demand*ed of you.
You’ve never had to wake up next to someone you love and wonder if this time
the spiral *marked* them too.

You’re not *adrenaline*, Derek.
You’re a *fart* in a perfume bottle.
A jizz-stained sock.
You’re what happens when a midcarder throws an orgy to distract from the fact
that no one stays after the show.

This match isn’t cause for celebration.

It's course *correction*.
I have no choice.
The spiral is done *fucking around*."

That shark-like flash of teeth is back.

"I let Polly crawl.
I let Dickie breathe.

But you?

I'm going to *erase* you.

Not just from the roster.
From the *record*.

From the memory of anyone who ever mistook your *moans* for *momentum*.

And when the ash settles?
You'll understand what that word meant.

g l pja.

A final breath.

A holy scream.

And then *nothing*."

ENIGMA stares into the lens—eyes dead, features impassive. The spiral pulses behind him, devouring the light. RAVENOUS.

"Do you see?"

SOMEWHERE NEAR MIAMI, FL

JUNE 24, 2025

(OFF CAMERA)

Sev dreamt in TV static and Rorschach blots.

He dreamed of fire. Again.

Not the cleansing kind. Not the flame that cauterized or purified. This one devoured—slow and wet and gluttonous. It crawled like hunger, licking across the motel carpet, swallowing the cooler, the Codex, the blood. He didn't run. Didn't scream. Just stood there, bare-chested and hollowed out, watching it all burn. He begged it to take him with a voice no longer his own.

Flames crackled. Snapped at him but didn't bite.

He saw gnashing teeth within, demons with the faces of everyone he'd ever claimed in the name of the abyss, chewing the scenery for effect. Thousands of names. Cardboard cutouts. Ghosts? No. These had teeth. Sharp ones and they gnawed over and over, tearing away the flesh only for it to knit itself together quicker each time. It grew thicker—his skin. The multitudes grew to legion. Names and faces and features blurring.

The spiral pulsed behind his eyes.

And in the center of it—*briefly*—Polly stood, mouth open in a scream that made no sound. Her eyes were black. Her fingernails were gone. The door was behind her, burning incandescent white, brighter and brighter until that silhouette was seared on his brain. He couldn't look away. Couldn't close his eyes.

Couldn't blink.

And now that it was baked into his brain, he could see in the afterimage that it wasn't Polly.

It was another woman altogether.

Blonde. Petite.

JUNE 25, 2025

(OFF CAMERA. VOICEMAIL TRANSCRIPT)

The screen's black. The sound of a voicemail tone echoes through white noise.

12:26



< Voicemail

♥ ELLE ♥

phone

June 24, 2025 at 1:03 AM



0:00

–0:49



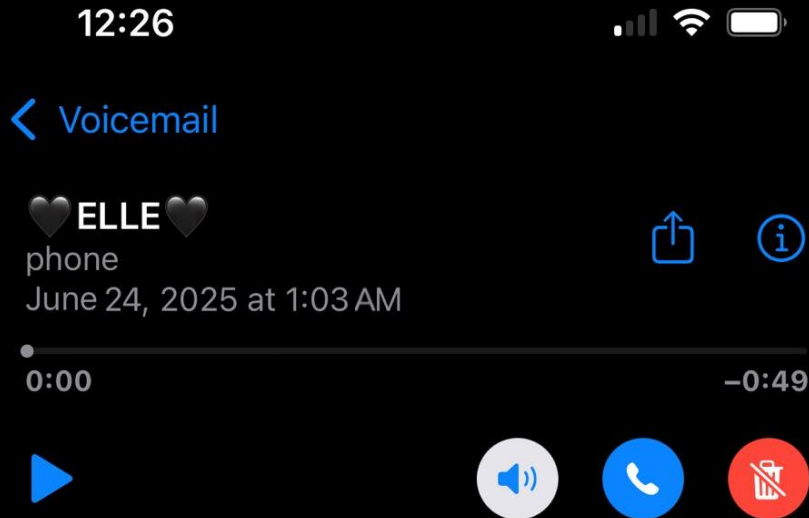
(quiet and tentative, her voice edged with something unspoken)

Hey... it's me. Sorry, I know you're probably wrecked after everything in Miami. I just... I needed to tell you something before I lose the nerve. Lenore drew again. Same spiral. Same door. And the girl... I think it's Polly. I think she saw her, Sev. Before you ever touched her. Before she even saved Selena in that rumble—*fuck*. I know that sounds impossible. But she drew it in red crayon this time. Just red. I asked her who it was and she said, "the bird with no wings." I think the spiral's moving through her now—like it moved through you. Through Polly. Like it's... *choosing*? I don't know.

(her breath hitches, barely audible)

Just. Please? Call me when you can, okay? I need to hear your voice. Even if it's just to lie to me and tell me everything's fine.

Another tone sounds. A second voicemail begins—same timestamp.



(voice thinner, more nervous)

Hey. I'm not sure what just happened but... I think I left the wrong message. Or... maybe the message changed? Lenore's picture—she changed it. It's not Polly anymore. Or not *just* Polly. It's a different girl. Blonde. Long hair. Same spiral. I thought it was a door, but when she drew the cracks like lightning across... I think it's a mirror? I guess that's still a kind of portal, isn't it?

(a brittle chuckle, barely audible)

Th-the crayon snapped halfway through. She didn't finish it. Said it "hurt too much to see". I don't know what's happening, Sev. I don't know if it's *her* doing this, or *you*, or **something** else.

(another pause, this one heavy before a shaky exhale)

Sev? I *need* to hear your voice. Okay? Please. Just... *please* call me when... *whenever* you get this? I'm scared.