

AFTER RETRIBUTION, DAYS BEFORE BREAKDOWN

It's a special season. At least, that's what I tell myself as I am getting to a point I am changing and not for the better. I have this problem. I am far too self absorbed and analytical than I should be.

Whether or not it's a special season I suppose is up for me to decide.

I just wish it were as easy as me saying and then believing it. I acknowledge I am getting to a point where I am sick of everything. Nothing means anything.

Oh you're just nihilistic.

No. I am fucking depressed and it's getting worse with time. It turns you nihilistic and it's a damn shame.

I am damn good looking, in great shape all things considered. I am fantastic at what I do, doing what I love, living the dream and I couldn't be more miserable. Maybe. *Who knows?* Maybe it does get worse. Who am I to say my mental disease has reached its pinnacle? It's a routine at this point so God damn old I do believe I am in a never ending cycle.

They say everyone develops a cycle and sticks to it, is this mine? Am I a prisoner to my habits? Trapped until I finally just croke over? I don't know. Fight it. Try something new- Am I even capable? Is chasing serotonin highs, regardless of tactic ever going to fit into the criteria of new? I never needed pills or a needle filled to the brim with narcotics. Everything I do is in the pursuit of the next great high.

'There comes a time and place where somewhere you have to settle. You have to give up on the things you can no longer accomplish. Those dreams? That's all they ever will be now. Acceptance is the first step. You waited too long, you've just run out of time and you lack the means of accomplishing your dreams. You lack the drive that was needed, the funds. Failing to accept this is a waste of your time and everyone else's. So accept your shortcomings now, for everyone.'

-Ace Marshall

“There you go slick,” I say while thinking of better times. Handing the picture of me smiling and giving some dumb ass expression back to the kid. I want to say the picture was from 2016 but I can't say definitively. I am aging like wine.

“What the hell?”

I peer up at the man in question. The boy's father? I don't know, could have been a sperm donor, could have been the stepfather. Like it matters.

“My son wanted an autograph, not a depressing essay.”

“And I want Winona Rider to suck my dick, we can't all get what we want,” I say cheerfully.

Someone chuckles. Some woman in the crowd looks upset while covering her child's ears. It wasn't Winona Rider so I didn't give a shit. Looking throughout the crowd I pull out my phone and start looking at a picture of Ravyn's beautiful cunt. These obligations to SCW were just getting to be insufferable.

"Can we get a picture?"

I groan, before putting the phone down. "Do I have to?"

They think I am joking. A very average looking woman approaches with her kid while some fat neckbeard stands in front of the table holding up his phone. I try to smile. I do. How many of these sessions have I done now?

I don't know. Do I really want to? Looking beyond these people there is just a mob of others waiting in front of the mall, there was no telling how many total. How does SCW have so many fans?

I remember days where this exercise was exciting. At some point these people just became a mind numbing nuisance. Did I ever do anything for them or did I just tell myself that as I was entertaining myself?

Is that the depression talking or am I truly just finding the vast majority of humanity so mind numbingly boring and irritating I am sitting at an autograph table mocking them just to make the day go by faster?

Is that a legitimate question?

No. No it is not. The crowds that used to be exciting have become endless hordes of obnoxious half beings meant to rob me of my time. After so many years it's just hard to care about so many people who you likely will never see more than once and generally speaking, they

just want shit from you. As a wrestler we are the product they are buying. Larger than life characters on a monitor week after week, year after year.

It's not like any one individual is the sole product though. One leaves, doesn't matter. These people were likely raised on the product. They'll die hooked to it. Do they see me the way I see them? Am I a person or just a false idol? Their ideal representation of something?

I don't give a damn either way. Whatever charm this side of the business had is long dead. I'll be damned if I can't have fun mocking them and being the biggest asshole I can be. Something needs to be there to pass the time.

Several Hours Later

The most I have ever deadlift is six-hundred and seventy pounds. Maybe slightly more for a rep or two just to do it. Most I've ever bench pressed is just shy of five-hundred pounds. That's the goal. Why not?

The cycle continues. The daily grind, turned weekly grind as everyday has its own repetitive themes. The things I cannot get away from. Mind numbing borefest. Required. It really is. I mean sure, most of my opponents seem to rest on being just over a hundred pounds and could be thrown around like rag dolls but then the other half are about my height and weight with some exceptions.

I think when I was younger I got into this side of things just to attract partners. Not sure if it's proving anything now but I think Lexy would cry if I suddenly developed a gut and lost my abs. Where is that going, anyway? What is it you're wanting there?

Is there anything I want anymore?

Staring down at the barbell, thought sort of just fades away. The music playing in my ear takes me away as full autonomy kicks in, the cycle continues.

That Evening

Stepping into the pitch black room, I rub my eyes before flinging my bag toward the bed. Immediately I hear a grunt as it lands. Blinking, I turn the light on to see Lexy dressed from head to toe in leather. She shoves the bag that I just threw aside before leaning up on the bed, proceeding to pull out a paddle. Looking further down it takes a moment for my perception to pick up on the strap on she is wearing.

“Hey client,” she says in an odd tone of voice. I think she is trying to be both menacing and seductive, I don’t know. Between signing autographs all day and going to the gym this wasn’t exactly what I was expecting.

I don’t know what to say. That thing is not going inside of me. It’s just not.

“Just a client now?” I ask.

“I-I don’t know. What does Hodges call you?”

Her recent surge of more attention has been enduring, although I am very alarmed by her new perception of the relationship I have with Matt Hodges. I shouldn’t be shocked, she was very adamant about vampires and hackers conspiring against her. Us. The entire band.

She’s insane.

“He calls me Ace-epapacita? I don’t know.”

I am insane too. I think. If nothing else there are definitely *issues*, regardless of whether or not I am talking to the people in my head or not. I suppose that could be something in its own

right that makes it all work. Sane is safe. Consistent. Predictable. At the same time, how in the fuck can she seriously think Hodges is...?

I am tired. I had taken a shower at the gym before making my way to the hotel. Sleep was getting harder to come by most nights. For whatever reason, it felt like I was getting less sleep with each and every passing day.

When you're half awake everything feels like a dream. You have no definitive way to keep track of time, how fast or slow it's all going.

In the back of my mind I am always well aware of where there are drugs or means of obtaining them. That's not breaking the cycle either though, is it?

Is free will an illusion?

Lexy leans back, strap on penis leaning up at a ninety degree angle, remembering there was a mission on her part.

"Please, there is nothing he can offer you that I can't. I can give you anything you want."

As if to emphasize the point she gyrated her hips. I did not want this.

Matt Hodges was a non-entity. He was nothing. An annoyance on shows who talked checks he did not have the means to cash. I had stood back long enough letting him talk, letting him make silly little promises. I was going to have to take my own initiative if I was going to actually get anything at this point.

Worse, he had driven Lexy mad by *existing*. So in that regard he was worse than annoying.

Pulling out my phone I head toward the bathroom while texting Alexis Taylor. My one opportunity to save the day.

"Hey- Wait! Where are you going?"

"Can't do anything babe. I am too drunk," I yell out stone sober. "Whiskey dick."

“But- I mean mine works!”

“Just doesn’t feel right.”

Today was all about being disappointed. Alexis was tied up elsewhere. Maybe literally, hell if I know. Sighing, I try to focus. I almost think my vision is starting to go to shit. Maybe it is. Pretty sure that would be tied to sleep deprivation too. Skewed imbalance, faulty creativity. Stress. Everything else.

A tapping at the door distracts me. Turning around after taking a moment to pause and stare at myself in the mirror, I open the door to see Lexy peering up expectedly.

It doesn’t matter how many times I tell her Hodges isn’t my manager. She is convinced we’re sleeping together. I try smiling. I wasn’t exaggerating when I declared that it was getting harder by the day.

The Following Day

Pulling my eyelids apart with my thumb and middle finger I stare hard into the cornea, before examining the lens. Nothing abnormal, was just having the dark bags forming under them. Nothing directly in my eyes implied I was continuing a three year mid-life crisis.

Did I have to sign anything today? I can’t remember. Were it not for company obligations we’d still be in LA. It wasn’t far.

Will I break a cycle today? What will be the highlight? What will present itself as particularly meaningful in any way? What is exciting? What is something I’ve never done? I wish I still had sky diving on the bucketlist- what if I just jumped out of a fucking plane and took

off the parachute? I haven't done that before. Maybe put that one on the backburner but definitely an option?

Would I see it as being just as meaningless as everything else?

The challenge would be changing my mind halfway into a fall. Which if I am falling roughly a hundred and twenty-five miles an hour from forty-five thousand feet in the air, you could maybe slow that down a little bit based on how your limbs are positioned and you could maybe try stirring to something giving you better odds than the ground?

I don't know. Food for thought. Something to consider. Letting go of my eye after staring at it for long enough to be concerned, I sigh and try to think of something different. The bane to my existence.

Grabbing my toothbrush I guess it's time for another repeat.

That Afternoon

Sitting out at the table I can't tell you how many times I've signed my fucking name. The older I get the younger my fans seem to get. The older ones have kids of their own and I am now signing their shit too.

I don't pose so much as just stare blankly at a camera acknowledging there is one there at times as they are snapped away.

"You're my second favorite wrestler!"

"Oh yeah? Who is your first?"

I stare bored at the seven year old holding out a book.

"Syren."

“Oh yeah?” I smirk for the first time in what could be days while it actually means something.

‘I am fucking your favorite wrestler’s wife and your mother’

-Ace Marshall

He stares at my message to him dumbfounded as I turn toward the crowd in front of me. I need real sleep. Something drugs help with. Something alcohol helps with too. Time plays me in the moment, going at a snail’s pace.

I think. I zone out for what I guess is an hour, look up at a clock to see only fifteen minutes have elapsed.

It’s then an older picture is dropped on the table in front of me. I’d seen it before but I couldn’t even begin to say when. It was definitely older, late eighties. The color sold that. I’d only seen so many pictures of myself as a baby, it took a moment to realize that’s what this was. I was but a cute wee baby being held by my parents in one of the few images of my father that I know of in existence.

Looking up awkwardly there is a cute asian woman smiling at me awkwardly.

“Where did you—” I try to ask when he then appeared.

“Hey, Champ. Can I get your autograph?”

He smiled cheerfully in what felt like a rehearsed to death Fonz attempt at being suave. I blinked awkwardly and tried to process this. As a child this would have been the most amazing day of my life. As a teenager I might have cried. Ten years ago I’d have been holding it back with likely a bit of resentment and rage before wanting to set up dinner.

Today I am not particularly sure what this old fuck can do for me, I closed that door a long time ago in my head, seeking closure in the only way I thought it was going to be possible in my life.

“Yeah, here you go.” Taking my pen I write on the old baby picture with a smile.

Go fuck yourself

-Ace Marshall

Smiling, I hand it off to the Asian lady apparently with this old timer and look toward the line. I ignore them as they look between each other and move along, giving way for people I at least don't hold nowhere near as much resentment for.

On the positive side, this off putting intrusion has given me some sort of chemical release. My senses are heightened more to normal levels, adjusting more towards someone actually sleeping a full night's rest. I even manage to legitimately smile while pretending to give a shit while signing more garbage.

Time has readjusted speeds, for a moment I forget the misery. Everything is tranquil, I can almost have fun again doing something generally so dull and tiring.

I was only scheduled to be here for two hours and that time had officially come and went. I took a few final pictures with people there arriving late. There would be a quick minute for some signings to do and I'd be out the door again.

Outside the mall I peered around before making my way toward the rental BMW. I wasn't particularly surprised to see the Asian woman approaching from behind me. Sighing, I consider

how a rational person would respond. The only conclusion I can reach is that I will end up wasting my evening where I could be doing something obscene with Alexis.

“Hiii, Austin?”

Sighing, I turn to her. I really prefer Ace. Especially from strangers.

“Okay, just shoot it straight with me,” I mutter. “Is the old fuck dying?”

She blinks uncomfortably fidgeting before shaking her head.

“No?”

“Is he in debt?”

“No- I- I think you have wrong idea.”

“I am sure he pictured some romanticized scenario where I’d cry into his shoulders and chase the dream of having a long lost father son relationship but I am too old to give a fuck. I am going to go to the gym, lift really heavy shit and run for a couple hours, go eat and then find someone to suck my dick. Maybe watch a movie or read a magazine. And then pretend to sleep for eight hours.”

“Uh- Okay I guess I get it, ha ha! Wow, you asshole!”

I blink at this woman unsure how to take that.

“Who are you again?”

“Oh, I guess I am your stepmom.”

Yeah that makes sense. She looks like she’s my age.

“Neat. Let me just-”

“No, hang on. I am not giving speeches or nothing. Soooo, I will give you number and you can call it, okay? Take your time, no teen angst though? You said so yourself, too old for that.”

She smiles cheerfully. What a bitch.

I stare at her undignified as she holds out a piece of paper.

“Will you go away if I take it?”

“Yeah.” Still smiling. Is that why people found me so annoying for so long? Always smiling? I sigh before taking what looked to be a phone number.

Then she stepped forward and hugged me, digging her face into my chest briefly before stepping back.

“You call your father, he want to speak to you!” She waves cheerfully. “Bye now!”

Sighing, I debate throwing it away before moving on. For a brief moment I felt confusion, I had forgotten the next part of the grind.