



Tampa, Florida
February 28, 2022

The cold drizzle of Tampa spring casts a gloomy shadow over the city. The citizens hustle through their day, the stores swarming with families darting about, some in masks, some without. The typical metaphor one would use here is ants, but people are not like ants. Nor bees. They are like people. There is no other creature like us: we are cold, we are obsessed with little things and big things.

That sounds redundant.

What I mean is that some people obsess over other things. Some obsess over people. Some obsess over obsessing. Kurt Vonnegut would say "So it goes." But I am not Kurt Vonnegut. My name is Elizabeth.

The misty air condenses around the pale skin on my left arm, finite clear droplets over bluish veins, and I am reminded of something. I am reminded that these arms have not been used for their primary purpose for some time now. Some people are

good with hammers. Some people are good with guns. I like to think that I am good with bending limbs and dropping people on their heads. Or, I am bad, depending on who you ask. There are some people who like that sort of thing.

There is a point here. I think it's that I have been away for such a time I don't quite remember how long it has actually been. In the past, I would know down to the minute. I told you, some people are obsessive. I was one of them. Am one of them. I simply obsess over something different. I obsess over my failures. Professionals call it depression. They give me medication for it, and I take it, and I still obsess over my failures.

A slight chill gives way to a shiver, and I wipe the water from my arm. It doesn't help. This is a running theme with my life.

I turn from the human display and open the door into Florida Orthopedic Specialists. It smells like Bengay and Tiger Balm. The old people mingle alongside the injured body builders. This is a strange place. I am used to strange places.

After scrawling my name onto the sign in sheet, I take a seat in the most uncomfortable chair I have ever sat in. You would think somewhere focused on eliminating pain would buy better chairs. Maybe they are good for your posture. I don't know. There are a lot of things I don't know. The old man beside me is snoring. The woman to my right is complaining about Biden and his magical effect on gas prices. Across from me, a man is yelling on the phone instead of talking in a normal voice; I can't understand his conversation, but it feels like it goes on for ages. I hate it here.

"Elizabeth, Doctor Ross will see you now," the receptionist chirps. Her cheery demeanor forces a sigh from my chest, but I smile and wave before opening the door to the offices. Upon entering, I find Doctor Ross staring intently at my most

recent scans, likely finding any particular reason I still cannot exert myself or perform. It is a hobby of his by this point. I understand the good intention; I do. But I cannot understand why one would make an appointment just to say no. Just tell me over the phone.

"Elizabeth!" he begins, turning from the images.

"Doctor Ross," I respond, attempting not to limp to my chair.

"I will cut to the chase; I'm sure you would rather be anywhere else."

"I'm a masochist. So what's the bad news today?" I ask, preparing myself for the inevitable.

"I'm afraid I actually have some good news today.". A look of curiosity melts over my face.

"Have some...what?"

"Excellent news. As of today, February 28, 2022, you are officially cleared to compete."

It takes a moment for the words to enter my ear drum, turn into signals, and communicate the context with my brain. I sit there dumbfounded, face slack in disbelief.

"Your physical therapy has done wonders, and the consultations from your friend's ortho..." he pauses and repeatedly snaps his fingers. "Oh, what was her name?"

"Bree?" I ask, dumbfounded.

"Yes! Bree. Those consults were invaluable to us. The team has watched your progress, and we now believe you can safely get back to work."

Have you ever felt so happy that your chest hurts? It swells in my torso like a wave, crashes against every bone in my ribcage and washes against my sternum. I attempt to inhale, but each breath is jagged, tempered, gets caught on every strand of disbelief in my body. I peer down at the brace covering my knee, then back up to Ross.

Ten minutes ago I wanted to slap him; now he is a saint.

"I'm shocked," I finally mutter. He knows this. I don't know why I said it.

"Well, considering the road it took, you should be. Coming back from this type of injury is incredibly rare, especially since it is your second. These are the things that end careers, not put them on hold. But you, Elizabeth, you had a say in this. A big one. Without your obsessive behavior, without your dedication to getting better, you wouldn't be going back at all."

I wipe a tear that swells in the corner of my eye. I hate crying in front of doctors. But this is... there are no words for it. I had convinced myself after hearing words like "indefinite" and "unlikely" and statements like "you will want to find a new line of work" that this day would never come. Yet, in the year 2022, here I sit with a lingering thought:

What do I do when I go back?

"That being said..." Ross continues, crossing his arms, "should you find yourself in this situation again, no level of determination will get you back into the ring. There will be recovery, no clearance, no return. Your knee is on its very last life. Keeping yourself from getting hurt should be your number one priority. If it isn't, you'll never walk properly again, much less get into the ring."

"So this is my last shot?" I asked.

"One that no one thought you had, and one you'll never get again." He smiles. "I'll forward everything to your employer. Hopefully, their team will clear you as well."

I nod. "Thanks." It's the only thing I can muster. I wholeheartedly expect to wake up, but that moment does not come.

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The cabin feels smaller the moment I walk in. The wooden walls seem to collapse in on themselves in an attempt to choke me. I reach my hand out, knowing full well they were not actually moving, and use the other to pop open my bottle of Loreev. I grab two and swallow them dry. An hour of this high-anxiety claustrophobia was not on today's bingo card.

But for the first time in a long time, my mental health is secondary. *We now believe you can safely get back to work.* I let the phrase play in my head on loop. Ross' voice makes a home between my ears. His voice is an orchestra that skips the beginning, skips the ending. The climax repeats over and over.

Get back to work

What does that even mean? After six, seven, however many long months of debilitating therapy, of lying in magnetic tubes, of X-rays and scans and therapy..

My excitement dims by the realization that I am not the same woman I was when Holly Adams destroyed my knee. I am not the woman who gave Cid Turner a run for his World Championship. I

am fragile. Weak. Unprepared for the daunting task of reclaiming what I deserve.

What do I deserve?

Redemption is a word I have lost interest in. It is a word tethered to the prospect I would never wrestle again. It is chained to the pain of the past. I used it far too often in the past for it to mean anything anymore. Every return was a shot at it. And look how that ended up.

What would Cid say? That was the hardest bout of disappointment, far beyond that of my literal injury. Cid gave me the key to a new career, he trusted me. Then I immediately let him down. I made a home in my valley rather than escaping. I took my first two steps, fell, and gave up. Surely he watched that and every ounce of trust withered like leaves in winter, like rotting fruit on the vine.

What do I do when I get back?

The question sounds easy enough. I can re-emerge from the darkness, make a couple people tap out, remind the world that I am the greatest "almost" to exist in this business. But people don't want that. They're easy to read.

They'll want me to exact my revenge on Holly Adams. I don't blame them. In the past, I would have made it my single purpose moving forward. My life would have revolved around it. But what does that achieve? What would I cost her? What equivalent exchange exists between stealing months of a person's career? Take time from her? Steal months of her own? Cost her a title match? What's the point?

Injuring Holly Adams will not bring back my knee or my time or my happiness. It is the briefest of goals, one I could achieve. But then what? What happens when I get my retribution? The same thing that happens every time I have a

one dimensional goal in this business: I float aimlessly through the company, never finding my footing. Then I disappear.

I will not fall into the same hole, nor tumble down the same slope. No. I need to focus my attention elsewhere. Somewhere more tangible. Something I can measure. I must climb out of this valley.

I won't disappear again until this leg can no longer carry me.

Tampa, Florida
March 28, 2022

"Hello again, my dear friends." Elizabeth's mouth curls into a wide, toothy grin as her words smoothly slide off her tongue. She soaks in the statement for a moment, the silence enveloping her like an ocean. Her eyes begin to water.

"After months and months of isolating myself from the world, spending more time than I care to count in machines and in physio, it feels incredible to finally speak to you again..." She trails off, laughing through her nostrils.

"Our first order of business is simple: Holly Adams attempted to end my career. She failed." Datura winks while nodding her head.

"Now, I want to smother a misconception before it gathers any traction. I am not returning to ruin Holly's life." Elizabeth takes a long breath, holds it for several seconds, and then exhales through her mouth.

"Most people in my position would feel contempt for Miss Adams, but I am not most people. If we are being honest with

ourselves, she likely did me a favor. She snuffed my disappointment like a cigarette. She cleaned up my inadequacies and swept them onto the operating table." Datura runs her tongue across the top row of her teeth.

"At this point, it is customary to say Holly should have killed me, that she should have gotten the job done. And that is true, to a strange extent. Despite doctors and better judgment, I stand here before you at rock bottom, and time is a fog too dense for me. But that does not matter. Little does." She holds up one finger, light dazzling off her painted black fingernail.

"I am not returning for revenge. That is a one dimensional response to trauma. I will not come for Holly Adams' head because I did something during my time away that was absolutely necessary..." She trails off, lowering her finger and clasping her hands in her lap.

"I sat in my own failures. Searched. And I searched. And I searched. And finally, I found her.

I found the real Datura lying in the middle of a cabin, curled into a ball and crying. I asked her 'what is it you want, child?' and she answered 'I want to be good enough.'"

Elizabeth inhales deeply through her nostrils again; her head tilts, and her eyes glaze over as she looks past the camera into the distance.

"So I responded. 'Then be good enough.'"

Elizabeth lowers her hand, resting it on the brace covering her injured knee. She glares down at it, her face covered in disappointment.

"The truth is, I *am* haunted by the ghosts of my departure. I have lost plenty of big matches throughout my career. My Tag

Team matches with Ryan Lacavie, my Unsanctioned Title match with Kimberly Williams, my losses to Regan. You have watched this scrappy young woman claw and claw only to fail and tumble back down. The valley was my safe place. The valley is where I belonged..." Datura clenches her teeth for a moment, her eyes closing.

"Two days haunt me more than anything. July 1st, 2021. After Cid Turner told me it was the end of rock bottom, that our match would be the spark that ascended me to my rightful place... I faced Shilo for my first ever opportunity at the Adrenaline Championship; I asked for that match. I begged for it. I needed it." Elizabeth buries her face into her hands, her pointer and middle finger pushing against her temples.

"And yet, despite giving that man everything I had, I let Holly Adams ruin my attempt at vindication. Shilo beat me in the middle of that ring, and I lost a match I pleaded for with all my heart. Shilo didn't get the best of me like he did the first time. Holly did." She grimaces and opens her eyes.

"The second is July 25th, 2021. Rise to Greatness XVIII. Many would think it would be the Breakdown beforehand when Holly almost destroyed my leg. But that moment is not one that keeps me up at night. No, I still dream of the day I wasn't able to even try. I will never forget that feeling, despite my best attempts, sitting in the back of the arena on crutches, watching people fight in my place. That match meant the world to me. IT WAS MY CHANCE!" she yells before covering her mouth with her fist.

"I thought I was done..." she trails off shaking her head. For a moment she pauses, finally doing the math in her head. "Eight months..." She pauses, wincing. "For eight months I thought the final match of my career was losing to Shilo. But hope. Hope is a beautiful song. It plays in the least

opportune of times. It reminds us there is still fighting to do." Her face flattens into determination.

"I learned a lot of things thanks to Holly Adams. Understanding. Forgiveness. But most of all, I learned how to be patient. After all this time, I understand who I am, what I was not capable of. I have forgiven myself for my shortcomings. I carried that patience in hospital beds and MRI machines and X-Ray machines, and into physical therapy. Finally, I carry that patience to you, here, tonight. So, here we are. Supreme Championship Wrestling, I sit before you humbled and prepared."

"And now the journey begins." With her hand rested on her knee, she bends it outward so that the camera picks up on its mobility. "As long as this body will carry me down that ramp and into the ring, as long as I can crawl, I will not quit."

"I will not wither.
I will not rot.
I have too much work to do,
And that begins on Breakdown."