

Fly Trap

Isn't it funny how everyone loves to shout about hubris? It's all about that fatal flaw and tragic downfall, everyone seems to be on the lookout for the next big disaster. Take a look at Greek myths, for example; the gods barely even try to hide how much they bask in the punishment of anyone dumb enough to challenge them. There's always a son with a knife, heirs plotting behind each other's backs, or Kronos doing something wild to Uranus, while Zeus lurks like a teenager struggling with his daddy issues. The gods made sure everyone got their shot, all it really took was a hefty dose of arrogance to act like fate was a weapon you could rent out and wield as your own.

Ryan wasn't out to topple any deities just yet.

Lately, though, something primal had settled into her chest, stirring every time she caught sight of the mountain of Selena Frost, the regal queen of ice. Selena, with her crown glued to her hands and veins like frozen rivers, looked like a beautiful, dreadful apparition that stepped right out of a fantasy.

Ryan had spent weeks trying to get Selena to notice her, and trust me, the onlookers were all too aware. The gossip floated around like cheap perfume, everyone speculating about rematches, pride, and unfinished business, the usual drivel. But honestly, they didn't quite grasp the real deal. It was something deeper, almost parasitic. Ryan wanted to weave herself into Selena's mind, to haunt her like a ghost. She craved that moment when Selena would wake up, throat burning, still caught up in the tension from their last encounter.

Ryan held onto those memories like treasures. And she was done pretending otherwise.

The night of Hubrius, what a chaotic frenzy that had turned into. The ring transformed into a war zone, bodies littered and physics gasping for mercy. Ryan made her move. Xander charged at Selena with all the grace of a wrecking ball, but Ryan sliced through the chaos, yanking Selena out of harm's way herself. Then there was the championship belt, lying there like a lonely dream waiting to be claimed. Ryan kicked it right to Selena, staked her claim before anyone else even noticed.

People spun their own narratives of loyalty and admiration, some sort of weird worship of the Ice Queen. Cute, but no thanks. Ryan wasn't about to be Selena's guard dog or acolyte. She was guarding the match, guarding her chaos, the future she clawed together out of defeat after defeat, broken nails, and sharpened teeth.

Subtlety? It was out the window.

No more half-baked jokes or lurking in the shadows, hoping for a stroke of luck. If anyone stood in her way to Selena Frost, they'd quickly find out exactly

where Ryan stood, and how fast she'd throw a punch (or kick for that matter.) Xander figured that out. Everyone else would soon learn too.

If Selena Frost was going to come down, Ryan wanted the satisfaction of being the one to shatter her. Not Xander, not Polly, not Colleen, definitely not some wannabe vulture-like thief eyeing the crown like immortality was just up for grabs.

Ryan wanted to be that moment of doubt for Selena, a crack forming beneath the icy facade.

And, as wild as it sounded, Ryan finally believed she had what it took.

Uncertainty? It had vanished.

The old Ryan, the anxious, self-doubting one who always played it safe? She was gone. Every humiliation, loss, and disappointment had forged her anew, tougher and sharper. Less forgiving.

She wasn't looking for gold stars anymore. She was out for heads.

Now, here she was, staring down another old accomplishment: The SCW Television Championship. Talk about a twisted sense of fate. The first time Polly wore that belt, Ryan had snatched it from her without breaking a sweat. But now the wheel had turned, dropping Ryan right into the mix again.

Only this time, she wasn't holding back. Playing nice, protecting egos, none of that ever mattered to her.

If the Television Championship was the barrier between her and Selena Frost, she was ready to plow through it.

Polly knew what happened when Ryan wanted something this badly.

Now Colleen MacDonald held the belt, she'd learn that too.

Ryan wasn't much of a fan of retreading old ground—but repeating feats isn't something she's a stranger.

Colleen had some real fire behind her now. People were talking. Management had noticed her. She went from being a mere placeholder to a formidable force. Ryan saw it, respected it, although every inch of her screamed to resent it.

But respect? That was a long cry from fear.

Ryan had already taken down Polly; beating Colleen felt nowhere near insurmountable.

That certainty settled in her like a deep-rooted calm. She didn't expect Colleen to give in without a fight, oh no. Champions always put up their best battles when they know someone's coming to take what's theirs. Ryan expected a dogfight, and hell, she hoped for one.

But worry? It was a thing of the past. That's what made her different. Fear and hesitation had vanished, replaced with the certainty that every match was no longer an 'if' but a 'when', another body on the path leading straight to Selena Frost.

Seattle, Washington — The Sunset, 9:35 PM, May 19th 2026

The bass rattled the velvet couch so hard Ryan thought her sternum might vibrate right out of her chest. She just let her head fall back against the VIP booth wall, drawing in slow, shallow breaths while the club's neon-green floodlights rolled over them, glossy and unkind. Her skin still burned from the dance floor, a sheen of sweat catching on her collarbone, making her look criminally alive for a Tuesday night.

Andreas, meanwhile, had already composed himself into the picture of unruffled disinterest. He sat tall, a silent warning to every nearby ego, six-five and carved into the kind of elegance that looked less like he'd been dancing and more like he'd just disembarked from a runway show in Milan. He combed his hair back, glanced at their glittering gloom in the tinted glass railing, and gave the faintest smile with his heavy-lidded brown eyes. Those eyes: permanently skeptical, perpetually entertained. He'd probably helicopter in from Athens and was already bored of America's weather. That was just how he operated—totally casual diaspora.

"I'm just saying," Andreas went, his baritone sliding through the club's wall to sound like it owed him money. He dragged out a sip of gin and tonic, letting his words linger. "If Marcus's band puts out another set like that, I'll fly them to Manhattan myself. Let them play the next corporate Christmas party—Dad would faint dead, honestly sounds like that'd be half the fun."

Ryan snorted, brushing a wild lock behind her ear. "This is your new vision? Usurping New York with garage rock?"

He shrugged, and the smirk nearly split his face. Andreas wore new expectations as if he'd been born with them stitched into his jacket lining, expensive fabric, casual attitude, not a wrinkle in sight. "That's the word. Dad's threatening to retire by year's end. A hero's burial in spreadsheets and, god help us, more men named Thad. The penthouse is decent, though. And my boardroom game, impeccable." He leaned in, thigh teasing her own, that sharp little zap between them. They were always in some competition: heat and daring, "get closer if you can."

There's a slight pause, "So. Seattle's living up to your coffee shop daydreams?"

"Coffee's magic." Ryan didn't meet his eyes, she scanned the crowd for a distraction, anything else. "And, miracle of miracles, it isn't raining. Did you catch the guy in the leather vest? Is he with the band, or tragically lost?"

Andreas didn't bother looking. He just stretched his arm behind her, a lazy king surveying his domain, and smirked right down at her. "Good try at misdirection, darling, points for effort, not for subtlety. Let's not pretend you're here to review the espresso. You're on the Breakdown card tomorrow."

Ryan bit her lip and stared into her drink, wishing the ice cubes might drown her. "It's just a match. No big production."

He nudged her knee with his, conspiratorial, always two steps ahead, always making it a dare. "Don't lie to me, Ry. This one counts. You've been working yourself raw for this wrestling gig to catch. You're taking on Colleen Macdonald for the Television title. I need you to admit you're nervous so I can properly heckle you."

"It's a lot," she revealed, words flat against her tongue, letting that old chest plate slip into place. She hated the conversations most, a feeling that didn't so much creep up as bowl her over. Wanting something this badly felt dangerous, greedy. "It's just business. Like your dad's. Look. There's a fog machine."

Andreas snorted, a throaty, bright laugh that scattered her defenses as easily as he'd loosened his tie. "Staging a great escape through mist? You know I see right through you." He caught her chin, not forceful, just enough to turn her face so she'd really look at him. His hand was steady. Personal, like a reminder of all the little arguments and banter threaded through their not-relationship. "You'll tear the roof off tomorrow. Stop acting haunted."

"I'm not being haunted," she argued, but smiled anyway, sharp at the corners.

"Oh, sweetheart, you're basically a haunted chateau tonight. Lucky for you, the bass is peaking." He grinned, slid his hand from her chin to her waist, pulling her against him with that effortless, insufferable confidence she never quite wanted to resist.

This is not where she'd pictured herself—hemmed in by Andreas, drink in both hands, totally outmaneuvered. It felt childish. It felt good, in the way things you

think you've outgrown can feel good. Her nerves zipped with every new instrument warming up below, the whole air prickling, dangerous and expectant.

She dialed her focus in on him, his face now so close it blurred. Strange, how even familiar people could sometimes look so distant. She still remembered the exact place on his lip where the skin chapped, the single spot she'd touched this evening.

A wild, dense energy filled her up, fascination and a little dread mingling at the base of her throat. Something in the air changed between them, quickening. Options narrowing. She had to just say it.

"So," she muttered, dropping her voice low, threading her gaze with his, "Seattle, not your usual stomping ground?"

He chuckled, squeezing her waist just as the next set's opening chords crashed through. And then he really pulled her in, like he meant it. The song built and the whole club shrank to their corner. "No, not really." He gave her a bit of a side-eye, seeing as she managed to change the subject yet again.

"Christ, LeCavalier. I'll have to catch up with them tomorrow."

Seattle, Washington — Trish's Closet, 3:00PM, May 21th 2026

Ryan drifted by the storefronts, not really shopping, more like orbiting the strip, the way people flow on sidewalks while in public, looking for something they'll never get. The Seattle rain kept time on the sidewalk, splashing out a beat she tried to fall into. It was just past 3:00 pm on Thursday, her mind hooked on tonight's episode of Breakdown like a dog gnawing a bone, but it wasn't dropping yet. So, naturally, she ducked into Trish's Closet, a boutique so pointedly curated you could taste the desperation to belong, air tinged with old perfume and new ambition. Everything was vintage but weirdly, aggressively fresh, like *"this isn't your grandmother's cardigan, darling."*

She spotted the knits hanging in the back, right by the dressing rooms, chunky, oversized things you disappear inside. She pulled a cardigan off the rack, shrugged it on. Before the mirror, there was this half-smile she wore, unsure, almost apologetic. Behind the glass, though, something else moved. No, shimmered, like heat rising off pavement. Her lungs snapped shut. She'd seen that ripple before, back in her L.A. mausoleum. The mansion was supposed to be a fortress, but lately it felt cursed, full of dark silhouettes, things breathing just out of sight, wanting, wanting.

She spun around, pulse hammering. The corners of the store tightened up, air going heavy, as if the dressing rooms were holding their breath right along with her.

And then: another shopper emerged, hell-bent on looking expensive. Tall, the kind of blonde that pops in candlelight, wrapped in a vintage velvet blazer that telegraphed "I'm complicated." She had a friend, messy ponytail, digging for meaning amongst the silk scarves.

"Oh my god, Camille, get the jacket," her friend shouted, sharp as glass, cutting through the boutique's murmur.

The name soared through the space, Camille, and just like that, she turned, eyes finding Ryan's. They looked at each other and, for a second, the whole boutique broke its performative cool. Time snagged. In the glass, something sizzled. Ryan blinked, and the store ghosted away. She fell into a sideways memory: smoke curling, windows melting, Casmir's name burned on her tongue. He'd died in the fire, and every part of it was still inside her, now just scraps of light and pain.

"Cas…?" Ryan tried to say, but Camille's name melted right back into Casmir's. She knew Camille heard it, the way you can feel thunder before you see lightning.

Camille stared back, letting that sadness wash over her, something honed by centuries or maybe just a really, really hard year. They traded war stories with their eyes, a private language.

Then, of course, the boutique's lights shifted, all drama, and the mirror almost shifted, shadows did their little parade. Camille clutched the velvet so tight her knuckles went ghost-pale.

Ryan yanked off her cardigan in a flurry, almost like she was trying to shake off a dark spirit. She stumbled to grab her coat, the fabric slipping through her fingers. "I... I'm leaving," she declared, her voice a shaky mix of desperation on top of bewilderment, as if she were speaking not just to Camille, but to the empty space around them—where things just felt a little too prickly for either of their liking.

They bolted for the door, ending up under the shop's sad awning, letting rain stitch rivers down their arms. Neither could look at each other, not at all.

Finally, Ryan forced a laugh, loud, out of place, a little unhinged. "Okay. That wasn't weird at all," she murmured, hugging herself. "But listen, I swear I know you. And not in the, like, I-follow-you-on-Instagram kind of way."

Camille looked back, rain on her lashes, her whole face shining with something old and unshakable, and Ryan realized: there are some people you never meet for the first time. They just walk back into your hauntings, disguised as strangers.

AFTERWORD

Truthfully, it's not my first lap around this track. Everyone's watched me bulldoze through the so-called crème de la crème at this company, but somehow, I still wind up here, asked to be a trailblazer yet again, held hostage in some endless Groundhog Day where everyone suddenly develops a personality, or at least pretends. Courage, character arcs, little acts of rebellion, I guess that's cute, in a slow-news-week sort of way. But, really, evolution in this locker room tends to look a lot like last season's shoes: expensive, overhyped, and already out of style.

I owned the Television Championship before, and, let's be honest for a moment, nobody wore it better. It sparkled. I sparkled. If only "The Star of Tomorrow" meant anything anymore, I'd have slapped it on a t-shirt on my way out

the door. But hey, time moves forward, even if some people in this company cling to their glory days like an off-brand Birkin. So now it's back to basics: boots laced, sleeves rolled, and the inescapable task of reminding everyone that memories fade but legends embarrass you in real time. I can practically hear the anxious chatter now. Ryan LeCavalier giving a damn? Sound the alarms! Wake the interns, buy more toner, somebody call someone who cares.

But let's get to the heart of it. I do have to take the title from someone, and, Colleen, while I wouldn't go so far as to say you're unworthy, you don't exactly spark conversation, do you? You give me Polly-vibes, and don't look crushed, I mean that in the gentlest way possible. This business isn't fair, never pretended to be. All we get are moments. I've had mine, and I've taken practically every ounce I could. Missed a few, fell flat once or twice, but I bet against me sometimes just for entertainment value.

Now, we're supposed to find out who wants it more, if that's even relevant anymore, or if we're all just starring in some beige drama series called "America's Got Complacency." The expectation, of course, is that I'll read you for filth and leave the ring positively littered with your name. But look, I'm all about public service right now, so here's a gift: I'll let you walk out with whatever dignity you can scrape up. Not every summit's climber-ready, honey, and this peak? It's out of your league, for real. When we go out there, I'm taking back what always belonged to me, and you, lucky girl, you'll be the reason people start talking about "that LeCavalier girl" in sentences with "legend." Top three, easy.

If you're convinced you're about to upset me, hang on to that little fantasy, manifest it hard. Truly, milk your delulu era while you can; I get it, we all need comfort. I'll give you just enough rope for that. But let's not get it twisted. You didn't win, you endured. Survivor, not victor. There's no shame, but by the time it hits you what that truly means, it'll be too late. The bell rings, and history won't care how brave you thought you were.