For better or worse, Dexter Grant was intimately familiar with feeling like the world was screwing him over simply because some higher power found it entertaining.

These days, he mostly associated it with his tenure at Innovatech as opposed to any higher power in a religious sense. After all, that had been Dexter's first introduction to the reality that if someone had enough money and power they believed they could get away with murder if they wanted to, they would not be afraid to openly use and abuse whoever they needed to in order to gain more power and status for themselves.

For as much as Dexter enjoyed having his eyes open to the truth of the world hidden beyond the screens, he hated that a man like Martin Zachary could claim to be responsible for it.

Martin had seen a bright-eyed, naive young man fresh out of college with all the potential in the world and eagerly weaponized those skills to effectively create the digital parasite that was slowly but surely devouring the minds of humanity every second they were glued to their phones, tablets or computers. By the time Dexter had grown wise and wanted out, Martin had let him go because he legitimately believed he'd gotten everything he could ever need out of him and it was time to move on to the next project that he could profit off of.

Only now did Martin seem to realize he'd perhaps been a little too hasty in his decision and was hellbent on getting his "golden coding goose" back by any means necessary, uncaring that Dexter wanted nothing to do with him anymore in any capacity. After all, people like Martin only knew how to get their way by hook or by crook, and with the growing state of wealthy business moguls proving to be untouchable thanks to one of their own literally being the President of the whole goddamned country, it was no surprise he felt safe in testing the limits of the law any way he could just to get what he wanted.

After all…in his mind, he'd already won, and nothing Dexter did could change that.

That feeling was part of the reason why Dexter continued his crusade through SCW no matter how much he was mocked or ignored for trying to do the right thing where literally everyone else in the company, 'hero' or 'villain,' ultimately helped the true evil continue to grow like the plague they refused to see. He didn't care if the face he could put to it was CHBK, Mr. D, Frank Delatosso, or someone who had yet to actually show their face but he knew they were a member of the Board or SCW's social media marketing team or anything in that ballpark, but he knew they were pulling the strings to try and turn his fight into just another thing they could market to the masses to line their pockets.

That was probably the only reason he was even in the position he found himself in for the upcoming Breakdown in Milwaukee.

Needless to say, Dexter was frustrated walking away from last week's Breakdown, prompting this line of thought about the world screwing him over for some sort of entertainment to consume his brain. He had once again decimated some poor sacrificial lamb who'd been thrown in his path just to try and satisfy him, but it brought him no closer to anything he truly wanted. While Disconnecting the masses before it was too late was his ultimate goal, the short-term prospects focused more on knocking several people down a few pegs en route to their own Disconnecting.

Unfortunately, finally putting Gavin Taylor down would have to wait as someone else's obsessive quest for revenge apparently took priority.

The Frosts would have to wait as Selena's latest world title failure seemed to sting so much she had fallen off the face of the earth and Deanna, despite any evidence suggesting she was better off letting her fall, had decided to dive after her anyway.

The Vision were apparently too shaken by their setbacks at Hubris that they were also going into hiding, as evidenced by the fact that Clyde was supposed to be a part of the situation he found himself in but was now conveniently replaced by someone else.

Perhaps the one that ticked the Digital Detoxer off the most, however, were the Glimmer Sisters. After spending so much time teasing the use of Gina's Trios contract to do something with Wendell and Destiny Page, knowingly getting on his nerves and likely under the skin of several others as well, they finally decided to cash that contract in…on a glorified lingerie contest of all things as a cheap way to try and steal more gold they do not deserve. But in doing so, they had effectively made any efforts to force them to finally put their money where their mouths were at the next pay-per-view impossible.

And yet…Dexter wanted to say that the world worked in mysterious ways sometimes, but he refused to give that much credit to whoever came up with this idea because he knew they were laughing their asses off in their cushy office and placing bets that they were certain would only make them richer.

"Fan's choice…" *he huffed under his breath.* "If this is their way of trying to prove me wrong, their sense of humor is even more twisted than I thought."

Dexter was trying to keep himself composed, but it was pretty damn hard to do so. Obliterating Brittany Williams last week hadn't been enough to quell the rage that lingered from Martin's latest goon squad he'd hired trying to literally steal the wheels off of his RV, and that fury had only grown after seeing the "big surprise" the Glimmers had teased all night. SCW's solution to the whole thing? Throw Dexter into a vote where the fans had the power, and as if to mock his

constant claims that management was deliberately keeping him away from their championship gold knowing he wouldn't play along as a cheap champion flaunting their prize on social media 24/7 like all the rest, Dexter was guaranteed to have a title match this Breakdown no matter the outcome of the vote.

It all depended on whether the fans wanted to give him what he'd been hunting for lately, albeit in a position that did not favor him, by denying him the bigger title shot on paper, or if they would give him that bigger title shot to spite him and keep him away from their greedy, lustful stripper darlings while hoping a rough-and-tough cowgirl would be enough to halt his crusade.

On one hand, actually winning the fan vote would not only give the social media overlords the chance to rub it in his face ("See? People do care about your cause, the numbers prove it!") but it would also give him a United States title shot against Meghan Strader. Truthfully, Dexter could care less about Meghan or the whole 'kickass biker chick' aesthetic she immersed herself in. If anything, his only gripe with her was that he knew she was a hypocrite like all the rest, proudly claiming she was a worthy champion who had earned it yet hiding behind politics to avoid defending her title just so she could farm clicks and engagement online for every picture she posted that shoved the title into the camera while taking a stance that, in his mind, ultimately did more harm than good the more it played into the puppet masters' algorithms whenever they decided to convince the people the right decision was that 'their guy' needed to be removed from power and someone from the side Meghan championed needed to become their new puppet president 'for the people.'

On the other, losing the vote (which he anticipated would be the case because social media had programmed the masses so thoroughly against his fight to detach them from it) would probably be his only chance anytime soon to finally humble the Glimmer Sisters, shatter their egos from the win he had practically handed them back during Fatal Fortunes, and ensure they would leave the people he cared about alone from now on. The only catch was, just like Fatal Fortunes, he wouldn't get to fight them with a partner he actually trusted. Depending on who else lost the vote, his options would be Colleen MacDonald, who no doubt hated him as a lingering remnant from all the bullshit surrounding what he supposedly "did" to Polly during Shot of Adrenaline, or David Striker, who at least hated the Glimmers as much as him but suddenly had a random bur up his ass thinking Dexter had any intention of trying to cut in on his Underground title pursuits.

"I'll bet someone in management fed him that lie knowing he'd be too angry to question it, hoping to make sure my efforts would be sabotaged," *he spat as he sat in his RV, rewatching footage of everyone he could either be facing or potentially stuck teaming with.*

The fact that SCW, anticipating that once Dexter lost the vote might try to 'force' a substitution for the tag title scenario to get the partner he would prefer, had made sure to also book Scarlett in a match against one of Adam Allocco's army of illegitimate children seeking to profit off his name for themselves, both impressed him at the level of foresight dedicated specifically to hindering him and only further irritated him to levels that could soon start proving catastrophic to the locker room if Dexter ever decided to unchain himself.

Still, trying to prepare as best as he could for whatever awaited him come Breakdown was a welcome distraction. With Sabrina gone because she was several cities away consulting with Matthew Ares in preparation for the class action suit against Innovatech and Wendell out shopping for something he insisted was "absolutely not a gift for Destiny," it left Dexter with a quiet night where his former boss and his insistence on being the bane of Dexter's entire existence were out of sight and out of mind.

Unfortunately, the peace and quiet was soon interrupted by a knock at the RV door.

Knowing that it couldn't be Sabrina and Wendell had a key to get in so he'd have no reason to knock, Dexter audibly exhaled through his nostrils before he shut off the TV and stood up to see who it was. He was already preparing to lash out in case it was someone serving Martin who was either hoping to take Dexter out or talk him into giving up when he'd made it clear from day one he wanted nothing to do with this dumb game in the first place.

The thought of it being someone completely innocent never once crossed Dexter's mind…until he opened the door and saw Destiny Page standing outside.

"Destiny?" *he asked, his voice clearly shaky with surprise as all the anger he'd been preparing to unleash drained from his body. He managed to recompose himself in fairly short order, though.* "Wendell's not here right now, I'm afraid."

"Hello, Dexter," *Destiny greeted.* "I'm, um…I actually wanted to talk with you, if you've got a moment."

Dexter raised an eyebrow, noting that nothing about these past few minutes seemed to be going the way he thought they might. "This isn't some sort of interview for SCW, is it?"

"It's SCW related, but not in any official capacity," *Destiny quickly reassured him, though that didn't seem to cut down on how skeptical Dexter looked.* "I'm just concerned after last week…"

Dexter hummed in acknowledgment. While he and Scarlett had effectively cemented their 'unholy alliance' as Adam Sharper had tried to coin it to ease Wendell's growing concerns over

whatever game the Glimmers were looking to play, Destiny had looked concerned by everything she was hearing.

"I know you don't really agree with what I'm fighting for," *Dexter told her as he stepped out of the RV fully now.* "But you're important to Wendell, and that makes you important to me by proxy. I know you say they treat you well through all the KABLAMia stuff, but don't think I haven't noticed how uncomfortable you look any time they try to drag you into their 'games.'"

"I mean…" *Destiny tried to argue.* "I did wear something pretty revealing in KABLAMia and Wendell…"

"I have no right to judge a woman on how they want to present themselves," *Dexter interjected, which did earn him a skeptical look in return from Destiny.* "I only have a problem when those twin twits do it because they're clearly trying to farm engagement out of it and make everyone else uncomfortable. What happened in KABLAMia is more the fault of the brainwashed buffoons ensnared in the social media web than anything you did, and if you're going to beat yourself up over trying to be comfortable in your own skin in a place like that, then I share some of that blame for encouraging Wendell to even go in the first place."

Destiny looks a little surprised at hearing Dexter encouraged Wendell to go for her, despite the very clear disdain Dexter had shown for the whole concept of KABLAMia when he'd defeated Derek Adonis before that show.

"But you've been mindful of Wendell's comfort and if he's comfortable seeing you like that," *Dexter continued,* "then you have the right to make that decision on your own terms. You're also allowed to tell those two you aren't comfortable flaunting yourself like they do just because of whatever connections exist or because they think they have more power than they do. Their 'fun' shouldn't come at the expense of your comfort, with or without Wendell's involvement…just look at the mess they've made of the world title picture all to say they'll get two of SCW's supposedly squeaky clean darlings to be nearly-naked in public for their own amusement."

"I don't know…" *Destiny still looked conflicted.* "I just don't want any trouble to come from you trying to white knight on mine and Wendell's behalf."

Dexter let out a slow breath, remembering the fiasco Destiny had been through around Rise To Greatness last year with Hollywood, The Dependables and "THEM."

"As I said Destiny," *he carefully replied,* "you're important to Wendell. Ever since he threw himself into helping my cause and I got to know what he's been through, I've only ever wanted to see good things come to him, because he deserves it more than even I do. I'm just trying to be

a good friend to both him, and you. If the Glimmers cared half as much about you, they would've dropped this the moment they saw how uncomfortable you looked and you wouldn't need to try and justify anything on their behalf. Yeah, maybe they're having fun…but are ***you*** having fun thinking about whatever they might have been implying dragging you and Wendell into?"

Dexter's question made Destiny really think for a moment, and the more he searched her face, the more Dexter could see his words really resonating with the interviewer. Regardless of whatever his stance would ever be on her social media presence or her potential movie career beyond SCW or how comfortable she was in her own skin, he wasn't lying when he said her importance to Wendell made her important to him, and he'd be damned if he let the pressures of what the world around them was becoming gaslight her into trying to justify anything the Glimmers had hoped to pull despite her blatant discomfort with it that anyone who watched the shows could see clear as day.

"I'm back Dexter! I think I've got the perfect- Destiny!?"

Dexter and Destiny both turned to see Wendell fumbling his way towards the RV, mostly due to him carrying one of those oversized plushies he knew people loved to get personalized as gifts for a loved one. Apparently, the plush was so big he could only see Dexter standing outside at first, but once he realized Destiny was also here, he quickly began trying, and failing, to hide the plushie behind his back because of its size. Destiny couldn't help but let out an honest amused chuckle as even Dexter grinned at his devoted follower and friend.

"I don't think you're going to be able to hide that from her, Wendell," *he gently teased him.* "Or even get it in the RV, for that matter."

Wendell reluctantly sighed before giving up on hiding the plush, instead offering it to Destiny. "I, um…I meant to surprise you with this before or after Breakdown, to kind of make up for…you know, everything with the Glimmers, and…"

"I love it, Wendell,' *Destiny told him, sincere with every word she spoke.* "It's adorable and thoughtful…you didn't have to go through all this trouble. I was actually just talking with Dexter about…"

Dexter started to tune out the conversation at that point, mostly because he wanted to give the prospective couple their space. They deserved to figure everything out at their own pace, not because someone like the Glimmer Sisters felt they had to inject their own 'ideas' into someone else's relationship. The fact that Destiny was nothing like them and wanted to make sure Wendell was comfortable with things going to that level was proof that she was more of a woman than

those two would ever be, no matter what they claimed, and if he didn't end up getting the chance to make sure they didn't even make it to Taking Hold of the Flame come Thursday night, then he hoped the so-called "greatest tag team of SCW's modern era" humiliated those two at their own game and drive them from the business altogether.

"Aw…they're adorable, aren't they Dexter?"

The moment where Dexter had been feeling better about everything turned out to be brief, because the moment he heard that voice, the warmth found itself consumed by a bitter cold that could only ever come from one man that Dexter wished would just disappear from the world permanently.

As Dexter had begun walking around the RV to give the two some privacy, he saw an unfortunately familiar face hanging out just around the front of the RV, using its size to hide from view until the right moment. For a man who seemed on paper like he was acting more desperately than ever, Martin Zachary looked almost as well put together as ever as he grinned at the Digital Detoxer.

"Never pegged you as the kind of person to give such sage advice," *he chuckled,* "especially about someone else's comfort."

"Maybe you should actually listen to someone else's advice once in a while," *Dexter retorted, his tone making it clear he was in no mood to play games right now.* "Pretty sure your original lawyers would've advised you to leave me alone ages ago."

"And that's exactly why I had to let them go," *Martin shrugged.* "Sometimes you just know better than the so-called 'experts.' Pretty rude of you to get my newest attorney disbarred, though."

"You…" *Dexter started to say before he struggled to fight back a laugh of pure disbelief.* "You think I had anything to do with that? I'm pretty sure Mr. Miller dug his own grave the second he lied to authorities trying to keep me from leaving the country ***for my job***. You know, the same job you tried to get me fired from like half a year ago now over something that didn't actually happen?"

"Yeah, yeah, the whole wrestling thing," *Martin brushed off Dexter's incredulous tone as if he was the crazy one between the two of them.* "You truly should have been fired, just as you should've been banned from leaving the country. You're a threat to everyone around you Dexter, and this frivolous lawsuit of yours-"

“It’s not ***my*** lawsuit!” *Dexter snapped.* “Have you become so delusional that you can’t even comprehend the idea that I’m not the only person in this world who hates you? You became a billionaire off the backs of everyone who’s ever worked for you, taking all the credit for ***their*** hard work! I have nothing to do with this lawsuit in any capacity, and the only part of it that interests me is the part where you lose ***everything***.”

“Is that so?” *Martin cocked his head, reminding Dexter of just how much he hated this man when he tried to act all superior like this.* “Maybe you’re the one who’s overconfident, Dexter…maybe you ***do*** have something to do with this lawsuit. And maybe, just maybe…you’re the one who stands to lose everything.”

Martin nodded his head in the direction of where Wendell and Destiny had been talking, and Dexter glanced over to see they were thankfully too engrossed in their own conversation over the oversized plush toy to notice.

“You might want to tread lightly, Digital Detoxer,” *Martin mocked as he turned and started to walk away.* “After all…I’m not the only one whose secrets threaten to unravel them.”

Dexter opened his mouth to respond, but decided against it as he let Martin walk away, knowing any physical response would pin him as the aggressor in the situation. He knew this was a brazen, blatant threat from Martin Zachary delivered to him face-to-face, which Martin would only risk if he was confident he had a foolproof plan in place.

Whatever that plan was…Dexter was certain he didn’t want to find out.