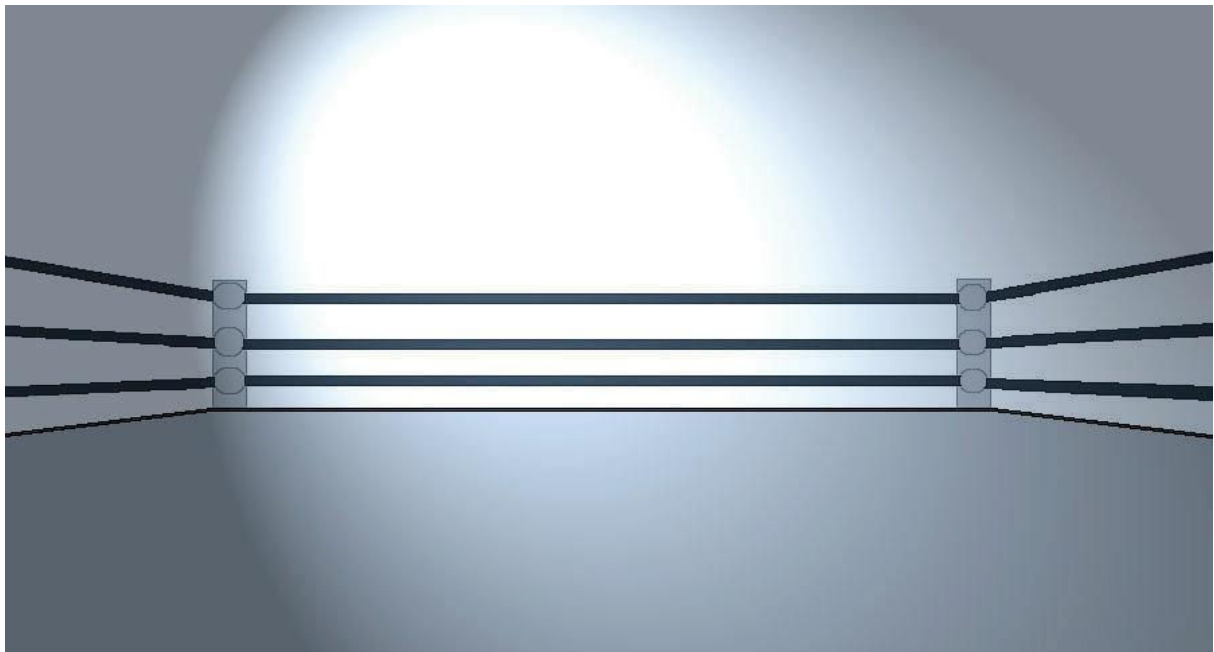


**In the world of democracy
whoever controls public opinion
may control the fate of the world!**

Borut Jurišić

WRESTLING THE CROWD

WRESTLING THE CROWD



A story of a boy, who grew up inside the largest living laboratory for shaping public opinion and testing mass crowd reactions, otherwise known to the fans as the world of pro-wrestling.

Technical data

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- technical data page,
- foreword, and
- table of content.

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Disclaimer:

All the characters and the events of this novel are fictional.

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Wrestling the crowd

I used to love the professional wrestling I got to see on TV as a child, but during my teen years the wrestling industry was in decline. With many other interests, I only started recapturing my childhood interest in pro wrestling as a grown man, seeing it in a completely different light.

It was the match between James Harris aka “The Ugandan Giant” Kamala and William James Myers aka George “the Animal” Steele, which they had on November 24th, 1986, at Madison Square Garden, that made me realize just how much control over the crowd two wrestlers (possessing in-ring psychology) can have.

I would like to dedicate this book, thought, to my family, to thank them for supporting me. My dear wife Snežana, who had to tolerate me watching hours of footage and interviews, catching up on my childhood passion. My daughter Sanja, growing up, trying to climb into daddy’s lap to see what I was doing. My parents, for handing down their passion for reading, and even my brother, who kept telling me all these wild theories, when we were still kids, trying to put me off wrestling.

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Prologue: How it all started?

It was back in the late seventies. The ideas like having a TV channel for playing only music were about to get born, but haven't been yet. The hard sex, and hard drugs, and hard rock were paralleled by recreational D.I.S.C.O. pills to make you jump around all night, both on the dance floor and in bed. And it was at about that time, at exactly half past eight in the evening that Max finally came to Huey.

Maximilian Miller, the son of a New York based wrestling promotion owner, better known to his friends as Max, really didn't know, why they all called the rich guy Ducky, but he figured it's a joke on his name – Huey Rockshield – with Huey being one of the three little duck nephews... Anyway, he hated Disney, and found it a silly rich guy's nickname, like Skeeter!

“Hi there, Max. I'm not in a habit of asking people to come visit me, but you seemed to have wanted me to beg.”

“Sorry, Mr. Rockshield, I was just really busy lately. It's the nature of our business that I have to travel a lot.”

“Why Mr. Miller, we are being very formal today, aren't we? Just call me Ducky, like everybody does. I bet your old man even forgot my real name – he's called me Ducky for so long. Besides, he gave me your schedule, so I know you could've made it earlier. So, drop the false modesty and tell me: why didn't you?”

“Er... well, Ducky, to be quite frank, I knew you wanted something from me, but wasn't sure, how bad you wanted it...”

“...so, you wanted to see, if I'd beg you to come over. You've got that gut instinct how to get inside other people's heads – and that's good for business, that's why I want to talk to you.”

“Why, thank you. My father thought me that, as it's one of the basic things you need in our industry.”

“Your old man is a great guy, but he's not that smart when it comes down to business. But I've been following your work in his company and how business picked up, when you took over some creative and promotion, but above all talent recruitment and expansion. And that, my dear Max, is why I'm sure we can rule the world together – through your industry.”

“Rule the world,” he said, for the first time really questioning why Huey called him over. Was Huey going to become a partner in the Wrestling Consortium? Himself, he always thought that the deal among territories was holding him, and the business, back; but his father stuck to the old agreement. Will Huey give him the backing he needed to make this into the moneymaking industry he always believed it could be? After all, he'd only need to push his TV business model through, making more money off TV shows than at the gate by selling tickets to arenas with live events, and start collecting off pay-per-view event.

“Yup, rule the world, Max. It's not that hard. All you need is enough resources, enough control, and above all, enough understanding of how people tick!”

“That sounds like Machiavelli.”

“Him? He got it wrong... but did point in the right direction. You know Max, Machiavelli said something along the lines – don't try to make people love you, it's an emotion you can't control. Have them fear you instead. That's something you can inflict upon them. And

controlling the emotions is the key... but for that, you need to understand the basics of human behaviour, the basics of mass behaviour, of controlling the emotion of the masses. Now, Nietzsche, on the other hand, had the right idea, to control masses through mass events, but opera wasn't the right theatre for it. Get it?

There were some people, usually called dictators, mass murderers and so forth, kinda did it... Did you know that even those who bitterly hated and feared Stalin shed a genuine tear at his funeral? They were just caught up in the mass emotion that was in the air, created by the accidental social engineers."

"Social engineers?" by now, Max was already a bit lost, but sure enough, wasn't ready to show it.

"Yes, like in Asimov's Foundation. The people who engineer the behaviour of masses and can predict the development of events in the future - if I do this, how will people react? How long will they tolerate something they don't like? How fast will they get fed up with something they do? And when will nostalgia kick in, for them to start liking even the things they hated, just because they're part of the past they'd like to think of as the golden yesterdays."

"And you, Ducky, believe I'm one of such people?"

"I have a few guys who know how to do it in theory, but I need to make a laboratory for them, where they can test what they are researching," Huey went on, without answering the question.

"What's that got to do with me? I'm a Wrestling promoter. I'm not running a hamster shop."

"I'm talking about live experiments on huge crowds of people. And don't give me that naive frightened look, Max, as if I just offered 100\$ to rape your dead grandmother."

"She's not dead..." he started replying confusedly.

"I meant the other one!"

"Oh!" And that 'oh' was more a sign of finally understanding where this is going and not about either one of Max's grandmothers... confusing a person, staying on top of the game and throwing several emotionally challenging conflicts in a person's face to keep him off balance (who cared if they were true).

"And you will be running that lab for me! Your father said he'll retire soon and leave it all to you... and I'll give you the money to run the promotion and blow it out of all proportions!"

"Sorry, Mr Rockshield, but I really don't understand..." sure, modesty seemed like the best response, even though Ducky said to drop it.

"The masses of people, Max, the masses of people coming to see your guys wrestle! Just think - people have been making fun out of the authenticity of Wrestling for years. They know, it's not all that! I mean, at least they got to see that no matter how hard a guy gets hurt in the ring, he comes back for more the next time the show's on. Yet, the people, they come back to see more! They want to cheer for their hero and hiss at the other guy. They're willing to pay money for something that they know has got to be staged!

It's like a great sci-fi novel. You know it's not real, but you don't want to be bothered by reality. Just please make it plausible enough, so the reader can be drawn in, instead of making him turn away."

"Is that what this is, Ducky, a great sci-fi novel?" Max asked without expecting an answer.

"So, your wrestling promotion will become," Huey kept on, without stopping anyway, "A lab to test what is plausible and what is not. How can you make the crowd love a man one day

and hate him tomorrow, only to make them love him again the day after. When people will and when they won't believe that a small guy has a chance. When they'll accept that somebody is just getting bullied and when not... it's pushing the limits of how far people want to be entertained, before their sense of reality will pull them off the magic roundabout.

It'll be a lab that will test how masses can be manipulated to love or hate a person, an idea... where our social engineers will be able to test their hypothesis and really find out how the masses react. And the best thing for you is, you will only have to do what comes to you naturally! You will take over your father's business and make it larger than life – with the help of my almighty bucks!”

“And if I take it over, I could go beyond territories?”

“With me, backing you all the way, sure!”

“And what do I have to do in return? How do I run this lab of yours? Like I've said, I'm a wrestling promotor, not a hamster shop!”

“You run your business the way you see fit, but every now and again our guys will come in with suggestions on how to change the story. Once a guy is really hated, they'll try to make him a crowd favourite overnight, and vice versa. They will test how far you can push a character down people's throats before they puke him back up again. Stuff like that!”

“So, they'll have creative control over characters?”

“In a way, yes, but in coordination with you. You've been out there, you feel the crowd... your guys, the wrestlers, know how to work the crowds – and we'll get you even more, the best of the talent, who know how to make it work. To study how they do their thing, to push them to see how the crowds react to something different. That sort of thing. You'll buy other promotions and get their talent and all, too.”

“Including TV deals?”

“I've said and all, you know what all is.”

“I really don't know Ducky, I'll have to think it over.” But Max knew, he wanted it, and he knew Ducky knew as well.

“You do that, Max, and read this draft of the contract while you're doing your thinking, OK? And come to my office Tuesday morning to sign.”

And that's how the Wrestling Consortium: Liberty League Wrestling was born, to become the largest sport and entertainment industry on the face of this planet – and so much more!

Chapter I: Building up a universe of stars

* *Our kind of a garden*

It was Thursday evening when I picked up a flyer inviting people to the grandest stage ever – the Madison Square Garden – to see the LLW (double L, double U) fights.

The event of the evening:

Humongous – the beast from the Glacier vs. Winston, The Mighty Ape-man of the Monsoon jungles!

See also

Samurai's sons vs. Jiving G.I.s

"Butcher" O'Tool vs. Terence Brogan

As soon as I got home, dad was there on the couch reading a letter, surely not wanting me to bug him with anything, but I did: "Daddy, take me to the Garden. I wanna see if the Butcher will split this Brogan open. You know, the old Irish style, like he does with the nightstick the cops still can't take away from him."

My dad looked up from the couch at me, put down the letter, and smiled: "It's too brutal boy. And besides, didn't you wanna see the flick on Saturday? I heard it's about a gunslinger, who fends off the attack of a whole Indian tribe to get revenge on the gang that killed his wife and kids."

Looking in retrospective I can't help to laugh at it... showing two guys fight and one of them bleeding was more immoral and brutal, and less children friendly, than a cowboy film with half a native village getting killed, just because they were Indians and they always come out of nowhere to be shot at.

"I don't care about those stupid cowboy films anymore. I'm not a kid you know. I'm 11 already." I almost admitted I started smoking too, but realized that's not a thing to brag with to your dad, if you want to seem older... *OK, I've smoked three puffs of a cigarette we all shared and all puked, but it made me feel older.*

"Really?" dad asked. "OK, if you get to stay away from the television and cowboy flicks the whole month I'll take you to the matches for your birthday."

"But dad, that's six weeks away!"

"You don't wanna go? No problem, we won't go."

"I do, I do, I do!!! Take me! I won't watch cowboys anymore. That's for kids!"

"And you're a big lad now, right? Let's see that punch of yours!" and dad put out his belly for me to punch. I punched so hard, the old man lost his breath, but he was so proud of me. I mean, when he had to go to school about a month earlier, because I was in the fight he just wanted to know two things: did I beat the other kid up and did he deserve it.

"Ufffffffff, 'atta boy, (cough, cough)," my dad was trying to catch his breath. He was surprised, but proud, "now please (cough) go and open a beer for me." This meant I was allowed to taste the foam... and a bit more, just had to make sure, there's enough to fill his tall glass. *Funny how fast you learn how to pour with a lot of foam to make the glass look full and cover what you drank for yourself.*

It was happening! Punching, yelling, kicking, twisting arms, choking, yelling back at the ref, the crowd going wild...

And although the two huge men were the main attraction, we all got wild when Terence Brogan, a Welsh renegade, a modern day Robin Hood, got attacked by O'Tool's nightstick! O'Tool already sent the Hellbound Hound and the Samoan Sorcerer to the hospital with it, seriously hurting their kidneys, but Brogan was a whole new breed of a fighter. He stood his ground, took the jab with the nightstick to the stomach and grabbed hold of it – the nightstick, not the stomach as all those wobbly-guts before him did. He took the nightstick away from the Butcher and hit the Irish man with it on the shoulder. My, how O'Toole started running. Brogan swung again and got the ankle, but the ref was holding him back. Too bad. It would've been poetic justice to see O'Tool get beat up with his own stolen nightstick and pay for what he did to all those other guys.

And then, just like with the greatest of stars, some music started playing, with drums and electric guitars rocking hard, and oh my god, it was just pandemonium! It was like Joan Jett was there in the ring. *Yes, as a kid »I loved Rock'n'Roll, and put another dime in the juke-box... baby.«*

"But dad, why doesn't the police do anything about it?" I kept nagging "shouldn't they arrest the Samurai's Sons for using their swords against our G.I.s?"

"Don't you worry boy. Our boys will get them the next time around. I'm sure the LLW will make them fight a rematch."

"How do you figure that dad? I wouldn't dare force anybody to fight them while they are armed."

He just smiled at me and took me for ice-cream. And while I was eating my triple chocolate fudge vanilla Sunday, he just lit up his cigarette and smiled at me, "Happy birthday kid!" and showed me the tickets to the next show we'll be attending.

Terence Brogan will be fighting for the number one contender spot, and the Samurai's Sons will face the GI's inside a steel cage, so anything goes and no one can interfere. It was gonna be awesome!!!

Yeah, my dad loved me and he loved wrestling and he was glad to see me happy, if doing something to make me happy meant we're doing something he likes and he could take me along... so wrestling was just perfect. I guess that made it easier on him, since he didn't quite want to take me to the pool hall or the gym with him... and well, it wasn't easy being a widower, and without a real job at that. Besides, although I didn't know, wrestling meant the world to him before I was born.

"Damn it Max!" James was furious, "You just can't do that! They'll throw you out of the national alliance of promotional wrestling. NAProW isn't taking such shit lightly! Why ain't you satisfied with New York? It's the god dam territory with most profits!"

Max didn't listen to James. He had Ducky backing him and knew he'll be able to buy out TV time of several promotions. Sure, it was live shows that brought in the big money, but most of the arenas started filling up only after people saw the shows on TV and knew how to follow the storylines.

This was one of the first hypothesis the lab-rats, as Ducky and Max called the social engineers who were analysing the behaviour of fans, came up with and it was spot on. The second one was even more important and it proved that Max was a genius!

"And another thing... how will you cash in on your guys being on their TV programming. Not even you would dare take your guys to another territory."

Max knew he didn't have to. He knew that in the future the live show (unless annual highlights), will just bring in the loose change compared to the money the TV product will produce. He was going prime-time with wrestling! Just like The Flintstones were the first prime time animated show and the most successful animated show up to that point, so will wrestling – Max was sure of it. And as soon as people would stop watching other wrestling shows at less popular times, the arenas won't be full no more and the local promoters will start showing interest into his business proposal – a merger, where LLW would be on top and other promotions would become partners for training talent and selling it off to the big leagues.

"Not to mention, you know nothing about how any territory outside your own works!"

Now Max finally looked at Jimmy and dignified him with a smile.

"You've been at this for too long Jimmy. You don't know what's possible and what's not. I've got people from different territories, it's just that I don't always keep you in the loop. You're too much of a traditionalist and would uphold the old territorial nonsense... so you know what – you're fired and I'll keep doing what I know is right, with the people who understand how it should be done!"

And that's how James Vernon Cricket lost his job, as one of the most trusted advisors of Max's father, but also as a man that time ran over on the highway of pro-wrestling revolution.

**** Next time at the show**

"Tell 'yer kid to shut up!" A man in front of us was yelling at my father, as I got just too excited.

But how wouldn't I be! I mean, just imagine the Samoan Sorcerer was back from the hospital and a complete newcomer a Sand Gene from somewhere in the Arabian desert, who got kicked out of Memphis for using too much magic against his opponents, challenged him to a duel of magicians, before clearing the ring for Brady McHaggis' match against the Masked Millionaire.

BAM, right there in front of me! My father decked the guy, who yelled at us. You could see right away that guy wasn't a wrestler. He couldn't get up from a single punch. I mean, my dad was throwing mean punches, but I bet Brogan wouldn't go down so fast. I guess my dad could still take even the Welshman, though. After all, my dad was in the army... a seal veteran. He was tougher than nails.

"Dad, you should be in wrestling," I've said. *If only I knew... my god, he was in wrestling, and how was he in wrestling after that remark. Now, I must say, my father was a good hand to hand combat man and he was in wrestling before he met my mother. It was in Tennessee. And he was good! He really knew how to work the crowd, which was not easy at all if he wasn't playing a heel (which he usually did anyway). But that was over ten years ago, he was in his mid-twenties then. Mom asked him, to get serious, after I started crawling around... and what did he do? He joined the military. He said, I don't expect to amount to much, but at least the army will take care of my family if something happens. He got back two years later, with a bad knee, since he got a bullet in it... and he was thinking of going back to the ring. And after that brawl in the arena – that I didn't know was a part of the show – he did! That's what the letter was all about.*

Security ran down the aisles to separate the two of them and Brady McHaggis took the mic in the ring. He was always rambling on about something... and now he picked on my father and the other guy.

“Hey, you there, glass jaw! Don’t be such a woos, settle the score. If somebody punches you – punch back... kick, scratch, bite if you must... just get even with the thug!”

Dad started gesturing for the guy to stand up and he did. He jumped at my dad, but security stopped them.

“Are you men or mice? Don’t let security be your excuse... if they won’t let you fight there in the crowd, come down here to the ring. You can slug it out here for everybody to see. OK, just have the kid look away, so he won’t see his sperm donor get a whooping!”

I didn’t even know it, but I was already a part of the show, which was to become my life.

One of the security guards was going to the ring and told something to Brady and he started announcing.

“Introducing first, being led down the aisle by his son, weighing at 292lbs, from the beaches of Miami, here is Dan “Big Man” Sawyer.”

I was looking at my dad, who just said, “Follow me, we’ll show him he can’t yell at you.” And I was walking towards the squared circle!

It was all real to me and pure magic. My dad was a wrestler, he was fighting against Bob “the Slob” Burger, who seemed much tougher in ring – and I thought he wasn’t a wrestler. Man, they were like two superstars... bigger in my eyes than Humongous and bigger even than the champ himself!

The Slob pushed my dad to the ropes and wanted to catch him with a double axe handle, but my dad held to the ropes, kicked The Slob in the gut and climbed to the second turnbuckle. He landed an elbow right on the back of the guy’s neck and decked him for good. He started turning him over to his back, but the guy grabbed dad’s hair.

I was so ashamed, that my dad poked the guy in the eye with his thumb at that point. I thought he really was cheating, but hey, he was my dad, so wining was more important, I just hoped nobody else would notice. And when I first saw The Slob in the dressing room two weeks later, I actually got to him and apologized for what my dad did. Ah, being a naïve kid... nothing beats a naïve kid... except perhaps drunk dads.

“One, two, three!” My dad won, he won, HE WON!!!

It was a week after my birthday, at a show I got the ticket to, as an additional birthday present. *Yup, dad liked to make anything feel like a huge deal – even with me. That’s why he was good with the crowd too.* Being 12 was gonna be awesome! It started off with me being at my dad’s side down to the ring, as he won a wrestling match *and returned to the ring after about 10 years at his late 30s, because after becoming a widower he never got any breaks. He couldn’t keep a job, because ever since he returned back from Nam he was taking care of me. It was short after his return that mom killed herself, when she realized dad found out, she was cheating on him while he was doing the same with some Asian girl that accepted small change. Max remembered him being a good talent in Tennessee and Norton “Nort the Lord of the Ring” Crawler (he was the main promoter there) had high hopes for my dad, just couldn’t pay him regularly enough to support the family. So, dad put on a uniform, and at a quite ripe age, compared to most of the 19 year old kids went overseas.*

“Dad, this is even better than my birthday was!!!”

I yelled that so loud the commentator's mic picked it up and those were my first spoken words in the LLW. *And they used it once, then once more, and again and over and over again in a televised promo, to show how much the kids love it and that it's a family friendly show. This really helped the ratings and the merchandise started selling like crazy!*

*** *Still at school*

I could hardly wait for the next weekend and the next show. All I could talk about at school that week was wrestling. There were only five of us at school that attended, with me being the fifth one. This was like being part of the cool though guys' gang everybody better left alone. The other four were older and one of them said he'd even run away from home, again, if they won't let him stay at a gym and practice to become a pro wrestler.

They allowed me into the group, when Bass, that's the guy who wanted to run away, wouldn't give the play-cards back to me and my two pals. He said we were too young for them and that he needed them to make a quick buck. I decked him with the first punch. He just started laughing and wiped the blood from the corner of his mouth, saying: "If you play cards as you punch, you can join me in the game. Got any money on you?"

Anyway, I understood him in a way. Me being without a mother and him being in a foster home. We all called him Bass, shortened for a bastard as all he knew of his parents was, that his bum dad walked out on pregnant mom two weeks before the wedding, two months before Bass was due. They took him from his mom after he was caught sneaking into neighbour's house and sleeping behind their couch, by the radiator, as his mom was a drunk and who knows where and there was no heating in their home. He was almost five at the time, and it was about three weeks after his grandma passed away. He was sent to an orphanage where the family found him, to adopt him. When they first moved here, he ran away, to stay near the place where they lived before... he had a friend there. But they came back for him – they're really not bad folks, although he just doesn't fit in with them. Anyway, as soon as he got here, he wanted to train for wrestling and his foster father put him in a gym where he trains. But it hasn't got any ring, it's that other kind of wrestling, the amateur kind. His foster father seems to think that's more important, but I never thought it was any good. Bass says it's good for starters, but he's not going to keep up with it for much longer – he'll go training pro and if his "family" *you could see the quotation marks pop up in his voice while he was saying family* doesn't like it, he'll just abandon them, *that was the worst thing he could think off, to do to somebody*. He already visits a pro-wrestling school every now and again, when he scrapes enough for a lesson – by playing poker. That's why he needed the cards that day. The other guy had a marked set. Oh, and besides cards, he also helps out at events, mostly setting up and cleaning afterwards, but they let him see the shows for free in return.

Another guy was called Smooth, since he was able to talk his way out of any trouble he could get into, but usually he didn't care about talking and just punched his way. He had two older brothers, were both half-good prize fighters. They have a little gym of their own in their basement they call the dungeon. But Smooth preferred wrestling to boxing. He said: "Both are fake, but in wrestling you at least get a career in boxing you take the envelope to take a dive

based on bets. There's no plan, no career, just do as your promoter tells you. In wrestling, it's all about putting up a good show and if you draw a crowd, you'll make it big."

His uncle Big Chief – Feathers-a-plenty, who fought in different territories, is almost always on the road, but took his three nephews with him often, to help them toughen up. It was his way of helping out their mom, who had it hard. It was Chief's brother, who baled on them when Smooth was born. He was jobless and gutless, got drunk and jumped off the bridge. He couldn't cope with having another kid, when he thought the first two were old enough to take care of themselves (they were ten and twelve at the time). So we all knew Smooth was the guy who knows most about wrestling, but his brothers wanted him to box... I'd prefer to wrestle, too.

The last two were the twins, but they didn't look anything alike. Mostly on a count of one of them being a girl. But, boy, she wasn't just a girl, she was one of the guys. She could spit further than anyone and punch you on the shoulder just as hard as any kid at school. I even heard she smashed somebody's teeth in because he was calling her a dyke. I mean, everybody called them Spike and Dyke, but she never liked it. She said she wasn't one, so nobody should call her that and if they did, they could expect her to put 'em in a full nelson and make 'em eat the words.

And now, not only was I talking to my friends about it, they were all seeing me as part of the family, part of the show. It was Smooth who spoke to me first: "Hey kid, you've really got a break, didn't you? Why didn't you ever tell us your old man was Big Man?"

Smack started asking: "Where's he got his schooling? Our old man never met up with him, so it couldn't have been here."

Smooth answered: "Nah, that wasn't on the east coast, so Titus wouldn't know about it."

Titus was the twins' dad and a mid-card wrestler in the New York territory. Except for Bass they were all the kids of the guys in the business and now I was one of them too. Still, it didn't feel right that Smooth knew more of my father than I did.

Spike punched me, real friendly like, real hard: "You're gonna stop schooling here now or what?"

"Wadda you mean?" I asked, having no idea, dad will take me on the road with him.

"I've hear in the locker room, you're going to pull that number all over the territory. That could have been my spot, but my dad declined. He wants to stay local, because he doesn't want to be far away from the family. That's why he passed the push for getting the Lightweight title."

I had no idea I'd be going on the road with dad. School stopped being important to me, never liked it much anyway, except for the guys I hung out with. And this is how my life started making its turn, taking me towards where I am now.

I was following my dad on tours to every town, every gym, every event he was sent to and I was getting to know the business that I've grown to love and hate simultaneously. Wrestling became my life and most of the wrestlers became my friends. And I've met probably all of the start – you name them, I've met them, managed them, wrestled them, interviewed them... or at least took their sweaty towels from the locker room to laundry.

I've left school to become "home-schooled," if you can call it that... I mean, none of the advocates for home-schooling would have me as their case examples in any of those books, in fact, guys like Ivan Illich would probably use me as an example of why home-schooling should be banned. Basically, I became a roadie for my dad and the rest of the gang in the beginning of the wildest of periods imaginable in wrestling.

But it wasn't as bad as it sounded, because we spent a lot of time back home too, and I'd be attending school during those days, getting together with my pals, putting on mock shows just for ourselves.

Chapter II: When things get though

** The biggest thing since sliced bread*

It was almost half past nineteen eighties and everybody in the business was nervous. Big things were going on and the biggest of them all just started happening!

My dad couldn't really wrestle on regular basis. Max's schedule was too much on him. He wasn't a robot. He laced the boots now and again for special matches, announced, was a colour commentator for TV shows, and became (*and from that I've learned the most*) a booker... and me, I was a nervous kid bringing water bottles (spiked with tequila, vodka, gin... whatever was colourless and strong) to wrestlers, carrying their jackets and towels... shining their boots and bringing them the good stuff, as they called it, to the locker rooms, training, learning the ropes.

I mean, nobody ever checked the water-boy for possessing and so I was able to get anything by the controls. Yeah, and probably I could have shown it to the guys doing the controlling, as they were paid to look away. But then again, who had better deniability? I wouldn't have known coke from powdered sugar anyway. Not at fourteen... were I seventeen already and having it licked off my cock by a woman twice my age... that would have been a different story. God, I feel old! I used to think thirty four – twice my age – was ancient, now I'm just happy she was too selfish to share the drugs. If she'd offer, I'd take it and probably wasted my life away.

"I don't want him to carry envelopes to locker rooms Max, that's all! Don't mind the other stuff, but this is too much. Imagine your Suzy doing that – you wouldn't let her, would you?"

My dad had a fight with the boss. He really didn't like me doing all the things I had to do. I don't know why, but I didn't mind taking the envelopes to wrestlers. Heck, giving them their payoff, or jack-pot as they called it, when they got the envelopes, wasn't a problem at all. It was the boots I hated, and especially the socks. Man, how they stunk. But my father was OK with that and everybody said as long as I keep doing this, I can practice with them to maybe get into the ring one day myself!

"OK, Dan, don't get excited again... we got a show to do. You're calling Brogan's match, it's the main event of the close-circuit network. We're putting high hopes into it, you know. And both you and your kid are a part of it. Is he set? And you, don't jump out of the seat to spoil his victory." He turned to me.

Sure, they explained it's all keyfabe, and that they aren't really hating or hurting each other out there – except if somebody is working stiff. *And back in those days many guys had an excuse to work stiff. The audience was really close and working stiff was more realistic, so the crowd believed it more. But yeah, just a few pricks really worked stiff – and simply because they loved it. They loved to hurt other guys and Max would use them to punish those who were out of line. Today, such enforcers are just a myth from the past... and personally I like that. Old school might sound like a good thing, but I've seen it up close and it made me puke my shit out.*

I knew very well about it, as I was one of the boys who could easily go from one locker to the other to tell the guys the endings to matches, keeping up the kayfabe, as heel and face locker rooms were usually separated. That's how I heard all the stories and got to know about locker room politics even before I could understand them. *Yeah, I've learned a lot from this and it*

helped me fill my dad's shoes. Still people felt like telling me stuff, such as Max saying to me – don't jump out of the seat!

Tonight is the night - the Fight Night of the Year – it's Punch Out Time! It's gonna be on every TV station from coast to coast, eventually, but for now just those who paid the ticket to get into the arena, or those who were part of the electronic ticket deal and could watch it live on their TV, would know, what's going on. I had a really important role tonight. I'm gonna be there with Brogan. I will keep his title, while he's fighting. They told me straight off, there's a big chance that Mitch "The Bouncer" Rendell will try to steal the title and it's my job not to let him get it. If he tries to do it, I just have to grab it and run backstage. There will be guys there to help out if he'd try anything.

Yup, I was scripted into storylines, but they wanted to make me think it was real. I guess they didn't fully trust a kid to do a good job of it, because they thought I'd react as a fan, not an employee. In a way, I was a test subject for keyfabe as well. If I swallowed it, so might other kids.

The match was about to begin. The Bouncer was already in the ring. His pompous music somehow didn't fit him. It was some orchestra playing some wedding or funeral tune and I hated it... the guy was too energetic for it, he should have some rock music to enter, like Brogan had.

The drums and guitars started and I started walking down the aisle, carrying the title, with Terence Brogan walking behind me, shaking hands with the crowd. I just knew, I had to make sure the title was safe. I felt all so important walking down the aisle. I never realised that this was the milestone in the history of wrestling, why with all the pop stars, athletes and commentators from other sports, even some politicians came out and shook hands with some filthy rich businessmen like Ducky Rockshield.

Anyway, when Brogan paraded around the ring with the belt, then handed it to me, he said: "Don't you worry kid, I don't really hate your old man, I'm not going to hurt him, he'll just make believe. So, remember, it's all arranged for. You just make sure that if anybody wishes to take the belt, you grab it and run for the backstage."

Sure, that was when Brogan was turned Heel and my father would settle the score in his final match, before becoming a full-time commentator and storyline writer. He had a good head for it and paved the way for me.

Sure enough, ten minutes into a match Mitch pulled something out of the booth and hit Brogan between the eyes with it. Ref – no other than the Kung Fu film super star: Qinn "Turnkick" Powman - saw nothing. I started yelling at the ref, but he just turned to me and said: "Don't forget your job kid. When Mitch goes for the belt, take it and run backstage."

Right, I thought, I mustn't get too much into the match. I've got to keep the title safe, even if I heard rumours my dad and Brogan will face off tonight.

Mitch threw Brogan out of the ring. Terence was down and out. The ref pushed Mitch back and started warning him. Terence waved at me to come closer: "Help me out kid," he told me. I was there, with the title in hand, ready to make a run for it. Mitch pushed the ref away as Terence was getting up to his knees, his hand on my shoulder as he was getting up. Mitch grabbed a chair to smash over Brogan's head, but he held me in front of him as a shield. The crowd was outraged. The champ was hiding behind a kid, what an outrage.

Mitch spat at his feet and pushed him with one hand and Terence fell back. Next Mitch tried to grab my belt, but I kicked him in the shin and made my way pass him, with the belt, to the locker room. Brogan pushed Rendell into the ring post and got back to the ring, just when the ref counted to eight and kept on counting. The champ won by a count out. The crowd still didn't like Mitch, but they started hating on Brogan. It was the main event of the first ever national televised live show of shows that Max put up and Brogan cracked under pressure, he hid behind the kid – me, he won by count out and he started bragging on the mic about being the greatest, with people throwing things at him in the ring (from sodas, to rolls of toilet paper). *Just where and why would anybody bring toilet paper to a match? I mean, I never felt like checking with one of the old school guys, if they were handing out things for the crowd to throw, or was that genuine anger, but toilet paper? Come on. Still, the funniest thing was probably what happened to Nailz Woodboard once – honest to god, it has happened, I was there and saw it – somebody threw their set of false upper teeth at him to the ring... and Woodboard just picked them up and said: "Ah, bite me!"*

I was backstage, where I met Smooth. His uncle was fighting in a tag team match earlier, so he was backstage. *Also, his brothers decided they'll enter pro-wrestling as it was more lucrative than boxing, so they were looking for a break.* They were all watching the monitors to see, what's gonna happen next.

After the count out, Mitch just got mad and said to the camera: "This ain't over, I'm getting that title. I am the next champ. You bet!"

But it was Terence, who was there, like a shadow of himself. No more heroic, humble guy thanking the crowd for support, but outraged and boasting. He kept saying: "I'm the champ, I'm the best. Just wish that yellow bellied kid would have the guts to return with my belt, so I can show it to you all, as I am the greatest champion you'll ever get to see."

My dad was behind the desk calling the action and said what everybody was thinking: "Isn't that just like the big champion, hiding behind a kid. Hah, he couldn't live up to the great names that held the title in the past!"

Terence overheard it and got into my dad's face: "What did you say, Dan? Hiding behind a kid?"

"Yeah, Brogan, hiding behind a kid, my kid!" He got up to the apron.

"Wanna make something of it Dan?" Brogan asked and slapped my dad.

He never even blinked, just grabbed Brogan by the head and jumped off the ring apron, puling Brogan to the ropes, bouncing him to the middle of the ring. Next, he got into the ring, but Brogan was getting up...

"They're going at it. They're good and convincing, aren't they?" Smooth asked me, standing next to me. When he saw my puzzled expression, he asked: "Don't tell me, they didn't let you in on the script. Brogan's gonna rough up your dad and in about two months they'll have a great match together. On your birthday. Your dad's gonna hang up his boots and soon after Mitch is going to take the title."

"No," I answered, "I thought they'd just yell at each other getting heat on Brogan."

"Sorry Timmy, I guess I ruined your birthday surprise then."

Two years after taking me to see the fights at the Garden my dad retired from active in-ring career and it finally dawned on me... Wrestling was everything, except what it presented itself to be. It was a though, physical affair. People hurt after matches, they hurt for days. Painkillers

and even stronger stuff (illegal) was nothing strange around the business. Not to mention how many people wanted to look the part. Huge bulking muscles, high flying stunts, power moves, getting hit hard, cutting and bleeding... only to do it again and again the very next day. The fights, the feuds people saw in arenas or on screen were scripted, so were the winners and losers of each match. But there were real fights and tensions backstage for people trying to build their careers, to make it big. Newcomers tried to get a push, established draws weren't ready to get their runs cut short... and all were looking for comfort in all the illegal, immoral or at least highly irresponsible things. But that was the evening my dad got to shine and the business picked up. Thanks dad! It was the evening I started understanding the workings of the business.

***** Enough heat to boil the ocean twice over!***

Just as Smooth said, my dad got roughed up and was getting put on a stretcher. Mitch was behind me at this point. He just put his hand on my shoulder, before I realized it: "You did good kid, just next time, don't hit me in the shin." Saying that, he pulled my ear, but not really hard, more like a guy who got a real reason to be proud of something, and shows in a generous way to somebody that he got even with him.

I just had to ask him: "Did you come to take the belt from me?" Still not fully convinced what was a work, what was a shoot, only with a rough idea how kayfabe worked.

"Nooooo wayyyyyyy kid," he said in his tough-guy voice. "But say, maybe you should run to your dad out there, whadda you think?"

"But he's not really getting hurt."

"That's only keyfabe, kid, he's not really getting hurt, but it would look great for the crowd. Just go there and start crying at your dad's side, when he's being brought in on a stretcher. You know, just for the show."

Rendell was another guy, with the perfect sense of the moment. He usually wrote whole scripts about his matches and that at the time when most people just ad-libbed it as they went along. But this time he simply improvised, luckily Brogan caught up to it...

I got back to the arena, still holding the title. *Not even Rendell thought of that, I just didn't leave it behind.* I ran to the stretcher into which my dad was being strapped into, in the meantime and started pleading: "Dad, don't let that phoney get you down."

It was as this point that Brogan saw me still holding the title!

"Kid! Get back here and bring me my belt! Bring it here or I'll beat you up like I did your old man!"

That one really got the crowd... nope, I still haven't the words to describe what comes after the 10th stage of blind furious rage, but that's how the crowd felt.

The crowd decided to protect me. Some men up front broke down the barriers and stepped between us (dad and me) and the ring, so Brogan couldn't get to me. One guy even said to me: "Don't worry kid, he might be big and mean, but real men don't stand for assholes beating up kids. Get your daddy to the hospital. This creep ain't going to hurt anybody anymore, if he wants to stay in one peace!" There was a loud "HELL NO!" shout from the other men in the group, as the riot started.

Chairs started flying towards the ring! People tried to climb in and Brogan had to fight three guys off, who made it pass the ropes, before the security established some control, surrendered the ring and kept the rest of the crowd out. After the crowd surrounded the ring they had to bring the police van in and arrest Brogan, because that was the only way to get him out of the arena, without people tearing him apart. Still, there were some drunk guys who got arrested while throwing stones and granite cubes at the station where Brogan was held in custody, demanding vigilante justice. That's how much heat all of it generated!

It wasn't quite on the scale of the Detroit riot later that year, after they won the world series... but it was serious enough as the crowd didn't know anything about the kayfabe. And all of us, dad, me, Rendell, Brogan, Max... and the creative team of social engineers (which I hadn't met yet at that point in time) learned, that there's a point just between boiling and exploding, that if you put a kid into the mixture and have the newly born heel threaten him, you'll get a nuclear meltdown. It was the first major experiment of the lab rats I was involved in, and it worked out perfectly.

Lesson one – how to make the crowd hate their personal hero they worshiped for over a year?

Lesson two – what to do, when you ticked off the first task on the agenda with a thick red marker?

And the best part was, me and Mitch were responsible for it, by doing what came to us naturally.

Sure, they scripted Brogan's heel turn, him trash talking the crowd and my dad taken out on a stretcher. Dad would make some video statement from "the hospital" and would start training for the match against Brogan. But when Rendell told me to go to my dad's side, me encouraging dad and Brogan threatening me, that's what tipped the crowd over. And it was on all the news. Wrestling even made real news, since it was a legit riot that spilled outside the arena, too. There were about eighty people arrested (and released after calming down, except for the guys throwing things at the police station and men in uniform – they were probably straw fed for about a month afterwards). All because of me! And I felt it – I got to feel the power. I realized the crowd got wild because I got there. The man talking to me, telling me they'll protect me, made me realize what the power of mass control was, even though I couldn't find the words to put to my thoughts and feeling yet.

We all met at Max's office two days later. It was a great honour for me as a child of fourteen to be there, that doesn't happen often, but my dad took me along anyway... he took me along everywhere, to teach me the tricks of the trade.

Max let out a yell: "Good god people, what was that!!!"

I thought he was beside himself with anger or worries and kinda felt I had to answer, since I knew I was the cause of it all. So I started humbly apologizing: "Sorry, Boss Man Sir..." Yup, that's how most of people referred to him, so I thought it would be best to call him – Boss Man, and Sir, sure.

He burst out laughing, they all did.

"God, kid, don't apologize! You were brilliant. You all were. Generating so much heat we could boil the ocean twice over!"

And that's how I started getting more and more air time, as they used this incident for months to come. It was decided I won't give the title back to Brogan. They also scheduled the rematch

for late fall, so they could milk out the incident. *There goes my birthday present from dad.* They really wanted to draw a full house and knew dad only had one match left in him – so it had to be a huge MSG deal.

I was said to be hiding out, taking care of my dad and sold the belt, since Dan was not supposed to wrestle and the company decided not to pay for his hospital bill. They decided a new title will be made, with the new name of the company, since they're going – bloody hell, finally (as they all said) – to be all over the states, well beyond the territories; nationwide and beyond. They called it the Universal World Wrestling Championship and it was a grand old belt! Not the biggest of all the belts, but the one which stood out the most for the logo of the LLW cut out of the golden plating, so the black rubber underneath showed through.

A tournament was set up for the next champion, as Brogan got stripped of his belt for being arrested, which was unbecoming of a champion. He was also not allowed to be part of the tournament and had to work his way back to the top... actually, they were waiting for the new champion and Brogan would be the first contender. But on the night of the tournament finale, Brogan and dad would have their fight, to settle the score, right before the main event.

Dad lost, after putting up a 15-minute fight. Brogan won clean, by suplexing dad off the second turn buckle, when dad wanted to climb the rope and drop an elbow. Dad retired to a huge ovation, after I took the mic saying: "Don't, dad, don't fight anymore. I'd rather have you admit Brogan's got the best of you, than see you put back to the hospital," followed by a big family hug between a father and son.

Brogan was laughing outside the ring, pretending to shed crocodile tears, mocking us, but three refs were telling him to go backstage. And we cleared the ring quite soon to, as it was time for Mitch, the first of two finalists of the tournament to come out... and "accidentally" we met while he was making his way to the ring, shaking hands, wishing him luck (for everybody to see and hear). Yup, it made Mitch the ultimate face, so when he defeated Erik "Viking" Svenson for the belt, and brought it to the ring to present it to him, it drew the biggest pop of the night.

At the same time, this brought me into the spotlight again. I got to feel the crowd, because the crowd felt for me. I became a part of the grand spectacle. I started working the crowd and... hell, that's when I decided I won't be a wrestler – I didn't like to take the bumps during training, I wouldn't like to take them in the ring – I was gonna become a manager. The mouthpiece of guys ready and willing to fight, but not really ready to work the crowd yet. I also didn't have to bring things back and forth anymore... they got Bass to do it. Yeah, he made it into the industry as well. Spike and Smack convinced their dad to get him in, for the kind of things I had to do before (including bringing the coke filled envelopes backstage). I mean Titus the Gladiator was not about to let his kids take the envelopes back and forth any more than my dad would, so Bass, with no parent in the business was perfect for it. I didn't realize it yet, but we were the next generation, getting groomed while still kids, to become part of pro-wrestling. And pro-wrestlers – and a manager – is what we've become, even before we could legally drink beer in all of the states.

***** My kayfabe family**

So, that was the time I moved from the theme park of the wrestling world, to live on the rollercoaster of a professional wrestling inner crowd. My dad hung up his boots and got the book, as he was good with storylines, making the feuds, promoting them in cities... so as a booker he got 10% of the gate and a steady pay for being a TV commentator.

This was a perfect deal. The steady check for commentary was the regular income and at the same time a great chance to promote the live shows, where dad was getting a share, so it was in his interest to get the house full. I was part of the shows, basically became an agent, because apart from helping set up the ring, training a bit with the guys... they showed me a trick or two, I was telling them the endings, feud angles, even helped them out with some suggestions how to present their stuff... but most of all feeling the crowd and was getting ready for my big chance.

During my trainings, I was attending an odd fight or two, usually the warm up matches. But, my main talent wasn't so much the wrestling moves, although I learned some. I changed my looks, died my hair red and had a Johnny Rotten porcupine hairdo to pretend to be an Irishman, who loves to stir up fights and run away from them. People didn't quite recognise me, so it was easy to gain heat calling people out, locking up and running away from the ring... letting the real matches begin, sometimes assorting unknown guys to the ring, to set them up as heels right away. I mean, the crowd instantly started hating me, so whoever was against me or "my friends" was the guy the crowd supported. It was cheap heat, but for unknown guys trying to break into the business, you had to explain to the crowd who to root for.

My everyday life became a mixed routine of being on the road one or two weeks a month, with dad when he was doing shows in the north-west, being back home for a week or two, while he was in postproduction, and helped him think of new angles and write storylines and even script matches. It was this scripting that got most heat with many guys of the previous generation. They were just used to matches being on-the-fly, with only the ending being agreed upon, but with the TV era, that was becoming obsolete. Sure, the veterans of the ring knew how to work crowds... how to feel them... and that was still the main point of the business, but the industry was changing. The TV audience wanted the soap opera, where storylines would go on for a certain time, so there were feuds built that would last half a year and the live show would only be a page in the whole story – and the TV would show the whole book.

"Dad," I've said to him one evening, "all the guys say, the house shows are there to polish up the act for the main event at one of the gardens. So why do you keep changing it?"

"'cos it's getting old, kid," he said, "if you tape it once, nobody will tune in to see a re-run of the same match. You've got to change something. The crowds are getting wiser. They can even tape the show on VCR and compare two shows, two matches... if they see they guys are doing it the same way over and over again, the kayfabe will be blown."

"You think people will find out the fights aren't really real?"

"The smart guys don't worry me that much... they figured it out a long time ago, but want to keep watching and believing. It's like with the movies. You see the same actor playing a doctor in one film and a ship captain in another... you won't really believe he changed his life around and went from medicine into sailing... but you'll accept his different role, if it's convincing enough.

It's the idiots that worry me. They start repeating what they are told, and as long as they are told we are legit, they'll believe it. Until somebody proves them otherwise; – and with VCRs taping so many matches, you just got to be careful.”

I understood what he meant. Many people have expectations when they come to see the show. If they got excited, they told other people and they might want to attend the show the next time, but the card will be different, so even if there's the same crowd, they'll get a different product. But when you move to another town, they haven't see this show yet, so you can do it again.

TV is way different. Every time something is aired, the same bunch of people watches it and will watch it the next time around, so it shouldn't be too similar.

If they lose the interest, they'll switch the channel and they won't attend the shows, when they reach their town. So, they got to be satisfied and the guys feeling the crowd in the arena, can't feel the much bigger crowd (especially now, when the main product is televised Friday night during prime time) in front of the screen. But the booker has to make sure, the show in arenas will appeal to the TV audience as well, so it had to look good on camera, not just the crowds. That's the new concept LLW has set up and it was bringing in a lot more money than the tickets ever could.

Yup, that was the beginning of the new era of wrestling and LLW was the locomotive that pulled the whole industry into a whole different direction. It was basically like with MTV and music shows. Would you rather watch MTV charts with your favourite stars from around the globe, or would you go to a concert of half known guys playing unknown songs in your home town? The TV brought in more money, but to do so, the machine had to be fed with good, but different stories than what the talent roster was used to.

Me and dad understood this and I helped out with the creative quite a lot. That's why the broadcast used a lot of taped shows dad was putting on, even if the crowds were not as big as they could be. *The way it was done back in the day, you had a crew for taping at each event, from A list events at Madison or Boston garden, down to a C list event in Foxborough, Massachusetts (OK, the garden would feature a full crew with many cameras and experienced directors, while Foxborough would have two cameramen and if it was any good, it would be sent to the editing, to maybe be used at a broadcast).* And I worked with the cameramen as well, giving them tips which things they have to get. They were grateful for that, as they got bonuses if their tapes were used.

Seeing I really had the talent for it, dad wanted to give me a push, as soon as he saw I wasn't so much into the wrestling, but into the creative part of the business. Sure, he insisted I train, get into the ring even if only as the ref, but he knew what an in-ring career meant and preferred me having a role outside, so he started pitching an angle for me becoming a rich-kid manager, as the illegitimate son of no other than Rockshield himself!

I was more than just happy and proud of myself, when the idea got through. I was to be Timothy “moneybags” Shieldstone, the bastard son of Huey Rockshield, making his way up the corporate ladder with daddy's money support, so I wouldn't reveal his identity and what he did to my kayfabe mom Hillary Hilltop, and cause him a scandal.

“Hey, Kid,” Ducky would call me after the show one night, while I was packing up the microphones.

“Yes sir?”

“Are you this prodigy that will make wrestling greater than ever?”

“I...” *honestly didn't know what to tell him*, “...think my dad's doing a great job of it.”

“And you know, don't you, I'm your real dad?” said Ducky laughingly.

That was the night, we'd start talking the details of the idea, to start working on the angle and Max came to the ring, which was almost completely dismantled by now, patting me on the head, “Haven't told him everything yet, but just wait to see his mom that you knocked up all those years ago.”

“She better look the part!”

Dad joined in, Max introducing him to Ducky: “This is Dan, kid's father. He's one of our bookers and used to work in Tennessee and Texas. He's also a veteran and got a bullet in Nam.”

“Always proud to shake hands with one of the boys who were fighting commies. And this is your boy, you're lending me?”

“Lending? With your millions, I'd have nothing against you really adopting it!” dad burst out laughing and Max and Ducky sharing the laugh.

“So, I've got no mothers, two fathers and a boss laughing at me,... am I the only one feeling like I'm left out of the loop – dads?”

“Oh, I like him already! The kid's got humour, but he's right. Fill us in on the story Max... over dinner if you don't mind. I feel like having a nice juicy stake. Is there a place with a decent brandy around here Max? My treat. After all, I don't get a, what 15, 16,...”

“16,” Dad jumped in.

“...year old kid every day!”

And off we went to some restaurant I never could afford and was always full, but as soon as Mr Rockshield showed up, they had a place for him and his party, with an extra chair left over for the lady who'll join us later during the evening.

“It's like that,” Max started, after chewing the last bit of the best steak I've ever had. “We want to push the Kid, what's your name anyway,” he turned to me, “I'm so used to calling you kid I forget.”

“Tim,” I said, “but everybody calls me kid. It fits.”

“Tim... Tim... Yes, we can work with that, Timotheus... something like that. We want to make you the manager of a stable. Basically, you'll get some of the young guys breaking into the business. But seeing you're just a kid, we need a good story for you, something plausible. So, I said to myself – let's make him a rich spoiled kid and his daddy shows money around to make him successful. Everybody loves to hate spoiled rich kids and with Ducky portrayed as your old man, people could easily understand why you got the push. You could be a great heel. Also, to make sure things don't go wrong, we got you an experienced woman to play your hot mamma, that Ducky had an affair with.”

“So, I'm the daddy pulling my weight around to make my son a successful manager... and a hot chick is involved in the story that everybody will think I've banged. Sounds good!” Ducky said.

“Wait, I know, I'm just a kid, but shouldn't we make this story a bit more complex?” Everybody stopped what they were doing and looked at me.

“In what way?” my dad asked me.

“Well, we got a hot woman who's playing my mother. That's fine. But we got my dad, who's trying to give me a push, but I'm still an illegitimate son. Wouldn't it be better that me

and mom are blackmailing dad for money and support? That way it can be all heel and you don't even have to know who the real father is... just say it's an important guy and get a few celebrities so people will be guessing who among them was the real deal."

"Brilliant! I like it. A blackmail story and a hidden identity, but people guessing Ducky's name. You're a genius kid!" Max said.

It was at that time that Hillary came to the table and all the heads turned to meet the sight of her.

She was hot, sexy and knew how to act classy! Twice my age and a bit more. She was over 30, but still looked like a pinfold.

Out of the blue, my father asked her "How old are you?"

This surprised all of us, especially as we weren't even introduced yet, so she answered honestly, "33."

"Perfect, so with kid being 16, you would have been 17 yourself, when you got him. Here's what Ducky will be blackmailed for – sex with a minor and making her a baby before splitting. That way we can make her a victim or heel, The Kid can come out strong or not and we have all sorts of possibilities for baby/heel turns, including Ducky, who doesn't have to be a selfish father anymore, but we can write it in a way that he didn't know about the kid, but wants to help now that he knows... anyway, characters got more depths and longevity."

Max just started laughing, "That's why I don't mind you cheating me on the gate money Dan! You're always thinking and going beyond the call of duty."

Ducky was already looking over Hillary, running his arm up and down her tie, "I like it. I mean Max, you know I'm game for the idea, but if my name isn't really exposed, or if I come out a face instead of a heel, it's even better."

"Perfect," Max said, "so you'll attend a few matches and I'll ask some other guys from the lounge to make appearances and we'll have the crowd guessing what's going on and who the daddy pulling the strings and giving young moneybags the push. And you Hill," Max went on, "just have to be seductive as always, but talk smack to the guest rich guys, just like they all humped you and left you high and dry while you were still a minor, not wanting to hear of you after you got pregnant. We'll make a story about why you kept the baby, maybe Selma – or one of the other grannies of the business – could claim to be your mother and so on... I'll have Steve and the guys from the think-tank work something out."

"Steve? The Lab rat guy?" slipped from my mouth.

Dad kicked me under the table, but Ducky already started commenting, although not directly answering me, "Say Max, how is Steve doing with the guys from the analytics? I see business picking up, but I can't tell if it's because of them or of the TV tactics you're using."

"Steve is still learning the ropes, Ducky, but the analytics give great results. For now, they can't really tell what's gonna happen. That's where the guys in the arena shine. But Steve's outfit gets the results of what was done and how it will reflect further down the line... especially with TV deals and pay-per-views. They already said that big shows such as the garden shouldn't be done too often."

"Why's that?" asked Ducky.

"TV audience wants storylines, wants to tune in every week and see the characters interact like in a sitcom or a soap opera. You can't build that up in the arena, especially not a really big one like the gardens. So the B and even C shows will carry the most of the storylines. That's

why Dan here, and his boy, are doing so well. We can always use some of their materials and I'll give them a bigger crew. The gardens and other big places are there for the wrestling, for pissing the crowds off, for resolving the issues on the spot, but the can only get about 18.000 people in MSG. Sure, you can get up to 15 bucks per ticket... but then again, smaller towns feel like they're important so you can get 12 per ticket there, just with a smaller crowd, maybe 5.000 to 8.000."

"Wait, Max," as soon as money was involved, Ducky started listening really hard. He loved the storylines and everything, but lab rats (*being his idea*) and profit, he really understood.

"So, you're actually losing money at tickets to produce TV shows. How much money do you get in return?"

"Like I was saying... for an event at the garden we could get about 270.000. But you also..." he looked at me, "...you gotta pay the boy, and Kid – don't blab any of this out, or I'll bite your head off! The guys feel they should get big pays for big shows at the garden, so they demand a bigger share than if they're at a community centre in a town they've never heard off.

In smaller places, we get about 80.000 per show, but the guys demand a smaller cut and the security is not really all that expensive. Also, the arena has a smaller cut... sometimes we can even get the place for free, if we really air the material. It's also easier to get local sponsors for small places."

"For me, the security really makes the difference," dad jumped in the discussion. "You see, small places don't riot so much."

"Why's that?"

"If you're doing the garden on weekly bases, you get a regular crowd and they get tired of things. They want it a certain way and you gotta make them go wild. You gotta stir their emotions, gotta push their buttons and riots can happen as well. In smaller towns, especially now that we're covering so many states, they get very few live shows. You get them emotionally involved through the screen and they are too overwhelmed at the live show to really know what's going on and you can work with them like with doe. They won't riot, they're not the regular crowd. They're there to enjoy the show, maybe boo the heels, but more of all they want the feel-good moment when the faces win!"

"Exactly," Max went on, "and although we make less than half the money in small places, the people who were at the show will follow us on TV. So, the networks will pay more to broadcast our show. Imagine getting just 1 cent from every wrestling fan nation-wide each month! That's over a million each month, and that's extra, because you already covered your production costs with ticket sales."

"So, by making less money at the live shows, you're making much more with TV?"

"That's right, Ducky."

"And my guys, like Steve, get their results and learn what they learn on the grandest possible stage."

"Absolutely."

"And," now Hillary joined in, trying to prove she's got more than just silky blonde hair, full juicy lips, stand out melons in the braw and legs to cause a traffic accident (*yup, with 16 she made me horny and hard just looking at her, and I'll be working a programme with her... hoping I'd lose my virginity along the way*), "there's also the merch. Action figures started selling like crazy, when we started broadcasting nation-wide."

“That’s right,” Ducky said, while running his hand up and down her back, “that’s right, honey. I haven’t seen those before.” But he wasn’t talking about the action figures, but about the figure that’s about to get some heavy-duty action.

“Well,” my dad stood up, “it’s getting a bit late and the kid and I still got some storylines to go over. It was a pleasure to have met you and I’m sure we’ll do great business together.”

Ducky stood up to shake his hand, revealing just how happy he was to meet Hillary, and Max said, “Sure thing, Dan. Will you meet with Steve tomorrow and brief him in on what we said tonight?”

And then the two of us left, me looking back over my shoulder at Hillary all the time.

“You know, she’s got more disease than the medical lexicon, don’t you, Timmy?” dad said, noticing how much I wanted to be in their company, in her company... in her.

I almost didn’t have to jerk-off that night. I was so wound up and had wet pants already, I just scratched it a little and things started happening. Hill had this effect on me, but I hid it from dad, as he really didn’t seem to like her.

Anyway, that’s how I became a manager and got aboard the creative team, with only 16, to be in charge of writing storylines and scripting matches that were to become the backbone of our televised product.

Chapter III: Being part of the show

** Friendship management*

We were in Edison doing a Monday evening show that was going to be taped, but only as a backup, if they run out of good material at the main show this Saturday. It was going to be my first time coming out in the role of a rich, spoiled kid manager. Almost three years have passed since the first “Punch out Time” that became the annual main event of the promotion. POT-3 was almost half a year ago, so now was the time to start setting up the feuds and storylines to be resolved at POT-4.

And tonight, I was to step into my new role, getting introduced by my kayfabe mom Hill. For our first promo we pushed Teddy Livingstone, a local wrestler doing an interview about his home crowd in Edison (New Jersey), away from the camera and Hill started talking:

“Forget this homeboy nobody. There’s a new kid in town, my kid, and he’s gonna be the greatest wrestling manager ever. Why? Because he has the right backer. A backer you don’t wanna double-cross. My sugar-daddy and his real-life daddy moneybags!”

I had shiny brown shoes, white pants, with a Hawaii shirt and a white fedora covering my short black hair (to make sure, people wouldn’t remember me as the provoking Irish), saying:

“We’re taking over the business, mamma. With daddy’s cash, your support and my head for the wrestling industry, we’re grabbing every title they have.”

“Right you are, sonny. You just pick your wrestlers out, and I’ll make sure, daddy makes them sign a contract with you as their manager.”

We still didn’t reveal anything about daddy, especially not, that Hill’s blackmailing him. So we kept people guessing, who my daddy is, while actors like Harrison Ford and Sylvester Stallone, singers like Neil Young and Bob Seger, even politicians like senator Mitch McConnell... and naturally Ducky, would come and see the shows.

Ain’t it great to be able to write all this stuff up, act it out and along the way even get paid... and laid? Yup, I lost my virginity to Hill, lost it 4 times within half an hour, and a few more times later the same night. Hey, I was young and she knew what she was doing...

That night, however, I only came out as the manager of Bass, Hill commenting I made a great choice: “He’ll fight great for you, and I can use him too.”

With time, my stable grew to include all of my four friends, and got their gimmicks developed. So apart from Bass, I also got Spike in a tag team. In singles he was under a mask as the Daemon Dark, but in a tag, he was Biker Spike – a bounty hunter understudy of Biker Butch. They were the Bounty Hunters. This was really good, as dad asked his old pal Michel “Butch” Stevenson to join my stable to help out in grooming the young wrestlers, and since Butch was almost retired, he was glad to get a chance to stay with the company for another year or two.

We also wrote Smack into the story, being 19 and thin long-legged, that she was one of Smooth’s girls, as Smooth was put in a pimp role. But as Smooth wasn’t part of my stable, we bought Smack from him, to be with Richard d’Longe, *known among his groupies and all the backstage as Footlong Dick which he really was, and not just any old foot, but his own size*

14½. This put Smack in with our group, but more importantly put Smack and Richard together, because they had a real-life crush and I had at least one wrestler, who wasn't part of my group, knew the business and wasn't about to retire.

Also, as Richard was attractive, we had planted women from the audience court him and Smack running off as a wild thing, roughing them up... so she became a heel girl wrestler, fighting fan groupies in the ring.

It wasn't quite Andy Hoffman, but it got the job done and started showing Smack as a hot babe and a mean wrestler.

Two months later, about at the time that LLW started building up the hype for POT-4, Footlong started being a part of Smack's routine. I mean, that bodybuilder was either pumping iron, or pumping Smack, if he wasn't fighting in the ring. And that started pissing Titus off, who was doing B shows at the time. On my own end, the audience started getting more and more interested into who my daddy was, as Hill let everybody know, he was married at the time, and let her pregnant, so she has him by the balls now, forcing him to make me – his illegitimate son – a success in the business.

Our work and Titus' wanting to do a program with d'Longe, to teach him a lesson about how to treat his daughter, got us into bigger leagues.

He wanted to fight Dick and be really stiff about it, to get him to lay off his little girl. He was an outraged father, working some big time shows, but mostly mid card, who was a bit in the years already and not used to other guys working stiff with him anymore. Dick, on the other hand, was doing mostly C shows, where the crowd is in your face and since he was still paying his dues before they'd declare him ready for the big times, he was used to getting stiffed. So two months after I was introduced as a young rich manager, my stable started splitting, as we put Dick and Titus in a program together.

To me, it all spelled that Dick was going to be put over, so I knew we had to reinvent him and push Smack along on the same cart. This was easy. I just wrote a story, where Hill would want a piece of Dick, with neither Dick or Smack going for it, revealing their real names are Richard "Muscles" Powers and Grace Powers. They were promoted as newlyweds – the BB (the beauty and the brute) Powers and broke off from my team, so they could become legit faces.

My dad had little time to come see me in person, but he followed the work I did with my pals, and he approved. He even advised me, to go in drag sometime to fight Smack and to be the special referee from time to time... just so I'd keep getting involved in action, and suggested I'd lose the woman posing as mom (he really didn't like Hill, so I never told him about us).

I was pretty much the youngest person ever writing storylines for other wrestlers. As the wrestlers were getting groomed, so was I and they all liked what they saw in me. That's also why they decided to test me out! It was a dirty trick, but I've passed. They wanted to play the crowd against me, to see how I'd react and since they knew my plans. The lab rats had their agenda and part of it was to put me in a squeeze, to see how well I can handle a crises situation.

**** Separating the talent from the weed**

It was two months after Titus found out about Dick and Smack and asked the creative team to take "the young lad" under his wing. I was glad we're getting out of C shows, because it

meant we're getting better and we'll be making better money. With us in the bigger leagues, however, I was just one of the guys who proposed possible angles, Steve and his team also did their writing, but Max's boys didn't quite like their version, so they went with my plot. Most important, however, was, that with only two more months until POT-4, the A shows were doing nothing but promoting the huge event, so it was the B-shows where new stories and plotlines were developed, to be used after the annual wrestling highlight.

Little did I know that while Hill was extracting the creative juices off my body, I've splattered everything about the plots I've planned. I mean, while she was giving me a strong drink and a rest from blowing my mind, she was just innocently asking, what I've planned for the next show... so I always told her, what I've come up with. Basically, along with her stealing my innocence, Hill was stealing my ideas too. That's how lab rats knew everything I wanted to do.

They wrote the part where Titus would destroy Dick in the first match and the youngster would start crying: "Give me another chance, I want to prove to you, I've got what it takes to be a man." Then he'd get better every other match, until finally he'd beat him and they'd shake hands to become a tag team. If only I'd pull my head out of Hill's ass for long enough to realize she was screwing me over... and over... and over again (oh yeah, up to seven times a day – my youth, her skills in seduction made me go like a steam powered piston) I would probably realize there was something going on.

For quite some time now, Titus was boasting how there's a new young bull to be brought to the arena in order to get his horn(s) cut and how he's going to make a dumb ox out of the young bull. *Well, it would better suit a toreador character than a gladiator, but they were also fighting wild animals, right?* Anyway, it was Monday night and the show started.

The crowd didn't know who Titus' opponent will be, they just saw him standing in the ring, talking, again, about some young bull, who's probably full of bullshit, trying to spin young girl's heads... when all of a sudden, Dick comes down to the ring with the horns on his head, simply yelling: "It's time to put up or shut up old man."

So, here was Dick Powers, with Grace following him to the ring to fight Titus, with Spike in the first row and it should have all gone down like this:

Titus would go out of the ring after being called out... to get the mic, and Dick would go to the ring to gloat that the old man ran from him. Smack would parade her legs around and at one point lean towards Titus waiving with the mic, to "provoke him" and then he'd say something along the lines of: "It's time to put the cows back to the barn and tame the bull!" She'd be turning around to Dick laughing at the lame line Titus came up with, and Titus would pull the horns off and hit Dick with the knee to the face.

The stooges in the crows should try and provoke me, to see how I'd react. They should start calling Smack a slut, making the crowd hate her and spoiling my tactics that the crowd would stand by a hot chick even if she was portrayed as a heel.

What nobody counted on, was Smack telling her old man something, that would make him freak out! This pushed an already edgy Titus over, so he slapped Smack in the face and jumped to the ring, ready to stiff Dick. Spike saw his old man slapping his sister, so he jumped the fence to be at the ring side. He explained later: "I just knew there was going to be real trouble, so I wanted to be close and ready."

This got the crowd wild already – a boring old B rated guy, slapping the hot young chick with a hyped up new wrestler coming to the scene... It was then I realized, there were stooges in the crowd, calling Smack a slut – but the crowd wasn't buying it, nor repeating the chants.

I've realized something was wrong, that there's much more tension in the air as there should have been. I saw Brady McHaggis in the crowd. OK, A list guys did come and see a show or two when they were off. They wanted to know, who they could work with in the future, get a programme against, but he wasn't watching the ring, he was watching me. *And I didn't realize he only started watching me after the slap, when he realized – knowing Titus – the shit got real.* I wasn't even a manager in this fight, I was just near the entrance to get the feel of the crowd. You can't get that from the monitors backstage.

As I was going to be a referee two matches further down and already had my ref clothes on, I went to the ring side, to sit down with the time keeper. Now that was dumb luck three times over, or my gut instinct was just at lightning speed my mind couldn't keep up with.

What I also saw in the first row of crowds, were enraged people (about smacking Smack in the face) and two guys who were trying to make the crowd turn on Smack by calling her a slut. When I spotted them, I realized Brady winked at me, to confirm I found the right guys in the crowd and that they really were planted, but they were facing heat from the rest of the crowd around them. Nobody bought into the Smack hate chants.

Meanwhile, in the ring, Titus put a full nelson on Dick and you could see it was for real. The ref was trying to get him to ease up, but Dick didn't complain, just got really red in the face. Spike looked at me from the ring side, with a puzzled look – as nobody really knew what he was doing there, so I pointed towards Smack and he caught on – *take Smack backstage, her nose was bleeding from the hit and she'd probably climb in the ring otherwise.*

OK, we could write this in the plot if needed, a wrestler, having a night off, saw a girl get hurt and helped her backstage – and there's a chance we'd get a feud between Spike and Dick over taking care of Smack... not the best way to debut in the B shows, but the plot was a plausible one, *I was making plans ahead, as if I still had control over things.* He just got her around the ring to the isle and waved at me to come. Dressed as a ref I grabbed Smack to escort her and she said to both of us: "Don't let them kill each other off in the ring. The old bastard lost his mind! And if pushed the wrong buttons Dick'll kill him... he will, I tell you, if somebody doesn't stop them, there's gonna be a massacre."

There was no stopping Spike now, from returning to the ring side... That's a bit hard to explain in a future story, especially if he gets in the ring to help the guy who hurt the girl he was trying to protect. That's why I rushed Smack backstage, where out of all people, Mitch was already waiting: "Hey babe, 's the blood for real? " he said to Smack, who was getting pale *probably realizing for the first time, that she hadn't had her period for a long time and that the smack to the face hurt her gut much more than her face.*

"Go save the show," Mitch told me, while he was sitting Smack down in a chair, "And if there's real trouble to be resolved, give the signal and I'll make a run in."

I ran back to the ring side, where Dick was just about to pop his eyes out, but couldn't get out of the Nelson, with the ref, not knowing what to do, as he didn't expect a shoot. He trying to separate the men, yelling something along the line: "The guy's got foot in the ropes, you've got to let go."

At that point Spike jumped in! Now that was just crazy, but he was afraid his father would break Dick's neck (which he really did try to do). Whatever Smack's exact words were, which nobody heard, they really pissed Titus off.

Dick was having a rougher time than imaginable until Spiked showed up – which came out of the blue for everybody. Most of the crowd saw this was the guy who jumped the rails when Titus hit Grace in the face. They fought he was gonna stand up for the girl. The two lab guys were whiter than chalk, but watering around the mouth. They probably thought this was a work and were getting hard on about the complex plot, yet afraid of the violent crowd that started throwing things to the ring and picking on them, for being on the wrong side of Smack. But it was Brady's eyes that were the signal for alert... he was looking at me, trying to tell me: "You've got to regain some control!"

I also knew, there wasn't a large enough security force in the building, if a riot starts. I was listening to the conversations at that diner table.

The ref got scared when Spike jumped in, as he didn't know him and thought it was one of the crowd for real. And with a shoot fight in his hands, he was just lost. So, I jumped in and told him: "Get rid of this guy (whispering: "He's a part of the act."), I'll bring the match home."

Relieved, he turned away from both fighters, and let go of their hands, which gave Dick his chance to throw Titus off balance. While Spike was ordered out of the ring by the ref, Titus started stumbling back, which gave Dick a chance to grab Titus' left leg. Where he got the strength to pull that hard, I don't know, but I almost got sick off it, seeing a man's knee snapping sideways.

There was a whole encyclopaedia of pain on Titus face now, but strangely enough, a lot of it seemed to be emotional not physical pain... I guess he realized he a) went overboard, hitting his own daughter and that he pushed her even further away from him, b) wasn't able to teach this young man a lesson, c) his son coming to ring to break up the fight (although unsuccessfully), and d) yes, he got his knee snapped sideways which had to hurt like getting your balls squeezed out for the eight load without a break, with nothing left to blast (*ok, not the best comparison, but it was the sharpest pain I've felt up to that point – thank you again Hill, I'll always get horny remembering you, you double crossing backstabbing blowjob artist of fuck*).

Titus finally let go all together, and both rolled to the centre ring. Titus was holding his knee and the crowd calmed down in an eerie silence, realizing the damage done. Dick got to his senses first, rolled Titus to his belly and stood over him, to place him in a underhook suplex, as this was the only move he could think of as a finisher. The problem was, Titus couldn't stand up. It's really hard to say, who botched the move (like any of those two even cared anymore). Anyway, instead of a suplex, both Titus' arms were pulled out of the shoulder sockets and I had no choice but to wrap up the match. I started pushing Dick back and wanted to signal for a stretcher, seeing Mitch ready for a run in.

This might have been a temporary break. I wanted to bring the show to a satisfying finale, but how to do that? The known guy was injured, legit, the newcomer came out strong, but I wouldn't dare Footlong come close to Titus for a pin or something... a DQ would seem like a simple and effective choice, but such a hot crowd would demand more and I wasn't ready to let them go home disappointed, or even worse – riot.

But then I realized, that Smack was still sitting next to Mitch and I signalled him to send her down to the ring, making it look I'm calling the stretcher! *And I must say, even though I got the credit for it all, hats off to you Mitch, you were backstage and didn't care about your A list status, you just wanted to help out the show.*

She ran down the aisle, but her feet weren't so sure of themselves. Her first reaction, when her father was laying on the floor, twitching with pain, waiting for the release of the blackout to come, was to smack him back and return the favour. I was kneeling over him, checking on him, when she did. I turned him all the way to the back and she covered him! One, two, three and we had a winner! Grace Powers! This drew a huge pop from the crowd, while the stretcher made its way to the ring. Dick grabbed Smack and lifted her to his shoulder parading around the ring and only I seemed to notice she had some blood on the inside of her left thigh, that looked out of place and not to come from her bleeding nose. The next match was on the way.

OK, so that was not the planned highlight for the evening, but it turned out to be. Other matches were time slot fillers after that. Still, the drama wasn't quite over, as the Bounty Hunters had a match later on and with Butch pass prime Bass was doing most of the work. But not being the sharpest knife in the kitchen, nor the most experienced of wrestlers, he botched a move and almost broke the neck of one of the Terror Twins, who were to fight in two months' time at POT-4 in a big feud to maybe become the new number one tag title contenders after the big event. That also got noticed, so a couple of hard decisions were made.

***** *The call to change it all***

After that night, I just wanted to get drunk, but not close to the venue, as I didn't want to get any fans in my face. So, I got into a cab and went for some half way fancy place, where I could get some privacy and pay for the things I'd love to get for free from Hillary. *Although I should have already get suspicious of her. But she had a way of not making me think, by keeping me hard and happy (the double H combo that works every time).*

But somehow, getting drunk, or laid, didn't feel quite right at this point. I guess it's the blood coming down Smack's thigh, the completely broken up Titus, and Smooth's older brother Terror Twin Tusk that made me want to face this thing sober and to have somebody to talk to and be able to fully trust by my side.

"Hi dad, I know it's late, but if you're not too far away, could we meet someplace?" I've left a call with the head office desk.

I knew they were taping promos somewhere, for the POT-4, so I guessed he was on the east coast, as the event will take place in Boston, so there was no way to reach him directly, but the office knew where he was and how to get in touch. There were some benefits of working for the same company. Jenny got through to dad right away and he suggested we'd meet at the Hungry Horse inn in Vernon, Connecticut, just off Interstate 84 for lunch tomorrow, if I can make it there.

I begged Michael to give me the keys to his rental, so I could get to Vernon on time. Not caring for show debriefing, I started driving in the middle of the night, not getting a wink of sleep, nor feeling the need for it anyway, to reach the road side motel near the Hungry Horse... *yes, it was all a one horse town anyway, sorry for the poor pun Mark Twain, I know you're too*

dead to mind in Vernon, where I finally got some shuteye, with a wake-up call for noon tomorrow.

Dad was there already, when I walked in, a little bit hung over from... well, just about everything really. *You'd think it's the booze and buzz that can get you hung over... trust me, when you get caught up in a shoot fight, and having to control the crowd, and manage to squeeze the biggest pop of the year from a thought live and almost hostile audience, you'll be hung over just as well!*

"Mitch tells me, you've done a hell of a job, but just can't control your guys down there, can you? And Steve said you're brilliant, but have scared his lab rats shitless from here until next Tuesday!"

I was beyond words at this point, so I just gave him a hug and he ordered ribs and beer for both of us.

We just ate there in silence and I've appreciated it so much, that he understood and didn't ask any questions. He was just sitting there beside me, after letting me know, he knows about it and that he's there for me.

After the second beer burp, I finally asked for the bill and we went out for a smoke and a walk, where I started telling him all about it.

"Titus was beside himself and really wanted to work Dick over, for screwing around with Smack."

"Yeah, us fathers can get a bit weird when it comes down to protecting our kids, but I guess it's easier with boys... you just need to toughen 'em up and they're on their own... with girls, I guess you just can't face up to the fact they're grown up and won't cuddle up to you anymore."

"You ever wished I was a girl instead?"

"Is that your way of telling me you hated to put on drag shows in the ring?"

"OK, fair enough dad," we both started laughing, and how I needed a good laugh at this point.

"Mitch called me last night, said you saved the whole show. Said you really were natural. And you can bet Steve had a report printed out in the morning. His guys won't be able to figure out what happened, but that's because they're trying to calculate the crowd reactions... they never could feel it as they've never done it themselves, but Steve said your work was commendable – coming from him, it's a big deal. Max's guys will be chewing you up though, for missing the debriefing, but Brady will cover for you, he was in the crowd scouting you... just come with a good excuse why you needed to see me and have good plot lines ready to cover the mess created. You drew heat, but have to make it seem like it was planned that way, but just got overboard... Still I've a feeling there's something more freaking you out, ain't there, kid?"

"It's Smack, dad."

"Titus girl? Don't tell me you've got the hots for her too? She's been with you at school already, and she's hot as a choppers exhaust after burning rubber across state, but I don't think she'd really do you any good."

Now I was impressed. I knew my old man loved me, but never figured he knew who my friends at school were, nor that he cared.

"Nah, I've got me a woman, to make a man out of me. Don't worry, although I'll probably always feel for Smack like she's my sweetheart... I guess all of us will. But I'm really worried about her, she got red last night, like she had a leaking tampon, but I know that's not the case.

I've had to buy her tampons every now and again, while I managed her... something's different this time."

Dad stopped to think and then slowly put his hand on my shoulder, giving me a little rub.

"I don't know where they took them, but I've heard there was a doc's report in the office this morning – Titus with popped shoulders and without a knee, and Smack with a broken nose and possible miscarriage." Saying this, he had a strange look in his eyes, more distant than any long stare he had while thinking back to his days in the jungles of Nam.

"You think, she was pregnant, Timothy?"

It's a rare occasion when anybody called me by my name, and it gave me shivers any time dad would use the full name, because it meant things got too real to be relaxed.

Yes, she was young and third month pregnant, but the shock from getting hit by her father, at the ring side, for real, was too much. We never knew, she tried to tell him about her condition. She wanted her old man to find out before she'd tell Dick about it. But she also wanted to make her dad back off Dick, so she got angry at him. Between both messages she said something that pushed Titus' meltdown button and it was too late for anything after that. The baby to be, was gone.

"I don't know what to think, dad, but it just felt so very wrong. And somehow, I feel responsible. I was trying to put the plot together and it backfired on all of us."

"OK, kid, listen up, you're the youngest of the bunch! Damn it, you're barely old enough to get drafted and can't vote yet... hope you're not flashing that fake driver's licence around too much 'cos it can catch up with you. And you feel responsible for them???"

Just because you look closer to thirty than to ten doesn't make you any older, any wiser or any more responsible!"

God knows I didn't need that talk, I didn't want to be reminded that I really still am just a kid! I was running the show with creative because I was good at it, not because I'd been around for so long, although 5 years hanging around the business didn't exactly put me in the total rookie position.

"But dad, I've got me a mature woman, I got a job in the industry, I took over responsibilities... how can I just claim I'm nothing but a kid and leave them handle themselves if I'm pulling the strings from the background."

He looked at me and took a deep breath.

"Listen up, this is probably the biggest truth I've ever learned in my whole life!"

I knew that look, he was trying to find the words and I knew he'll want to tell me something really important – and for once in his life, he really wasn't bullshitting me! Not that it made much difference to me, at least not yet. Oh, don't pretend you're any different. Just admit (at least to yourself) how many times you could have avoided trouble if you'd just listen... but no, you had to make your own mistakes. Well, so did I... so do I, still.

"I got you into the industry, Timmy, and you soaked it up like a sponge. You were so green and even believed the fights were legit. I know, it's my fault, I got you into all of this. But I couldn't do much different. Not if I ever wanted to give you something to hold on to in your life. And I'm so proud you got better at background work than between the ropes. I thought you'll be another grappler and was always afraid you'd break a leg or something... but you've shown so much talent you got to join the creative. Usually they wouldn't let anybody who wasn't a first-class booker and bringing in big money do that. These are great times, Max is doing

things no promoter ever did and is trying out new approaches – one of them is you! Giving a teenager a chance to create the show that would attract teenagers, who'll become fans for much longer. Grown-ups only buy tickets and beer at the stands... teenagers buy tickets, merchandise, want to train and join up... plus they pass the passion to their younger siblings, so things like action toys are also being sold. That's where the money is coming from. Get an arena full of people – great, but get all the kids to watch the show in front of the TV, where money is made according to ratings and PPVs, and you'll sell action figures worth more than all of the people at a house shows weight worth in gold.

You'll get a great chance, but sure, you've got a lot to learn still. Now I know you don't want to hear that, but what you've saw last night was nothing. Sure, it was though, but trust me, worse nights are ahead of you. Especially now that they've seen you can handle them. You'll become part of the bigger shows and you'll be involved with people who're playing backstage politics.

Titus was a guy who wanted to do something about his daughter and her fucker. He pulled a string or two... but he ain't got much weight behind him. If you go forth, you'll go into big leagues. There's people with strings that have more weight than whole of you together. Imagine getting a storyline with Mitch or Brady... they're really great guys and I've been pushing them to scout you because I want them to take you under their wings, not guys like Brogan or god forbids the Ape-man! Nothing against them, but they're just no good for you. One would flush you down like a piece of shit and the other would patronise the hair out of your skull – and you wouldn't get any further. On the other hand, if you'd get somebody too weak, like Titus for example, you'd get caught on the wrong side of the wall when the execution squad would open fire."

"I get it dad, Mitch and Brady are your friends and they're good guys," I was getting agitated. There were so many things I wanted to talk about, but he was just going on and on about the ins and outs of the business.

"Good to know. But let me finish," he went on. "So, there will be much more pressure upon you and you've got to handle it. You mustn't trust anybody. What happened last night, was a shoot. It could have buried you if Titus got his way. But the shoot went wrong, very wrong. That shook everybody up, but you're in luck and can recover. Imagine somebody wanting to burry you directly and would pull a shoot like that? I'm saying, just be careful. And definitely don't trust anybody outside your family – that's you and me only!"

"What, I shouldn't talk to Hill about it?"

"Who's Hill?"

"She's my woman, never mind her. She's OK."

"Hillary?!?!" He let out a yell. "You're with Happy Hour Hillary? The one they paired you with in the kayfabe?"

I still didn't get to let all the stuff off my chest and already I felt like the whole talk with my dad was a mistake, but just didn't have the energy to do anything else but to try and ignore whatever lesson he'd give me. I was hoping... I don't know what I was hoping for. I felt down and wanted to talk to somebody I'd trust. Sure – I can trust my old man. But I also wanted somebody to support me. So far he told me it'll get a lot worse, that I'm a kid of whom nobody expects to know what he's doing yet, and that my sperm hungry, cock riding, ball squeezing, deep-throat giving coke storage was nothing more than a slut that's bad for me.

"Don't! Not to her. You shouldn't talk to her about any of your plans. I don't know who's ploughing her ass, nor where she gets the stuff from, but I know that everything you'll say to her or around her, will be used against you.

She's bad news. It would be better you'd get some other whore to trim your horn too, not that Hill's not excellent in that, but she might just ruin you for any half normal girl you'd meet later on. As a father, I'm really telling you, it would be best for you to have nothing to do with Hillary."

"You know her," I've asked, "that well?"

"On the outside and inside."

"So that's what she meant when she said – like father, like son."

It was one of those rare occasions that my father blushed. But at least now I felt we're getting on with the conversation. I still had this need to get things off my chest.

"..." he started saying, but decided to tap me over the shoulder and that we should go back in for another beer.

The waiter was holding a phone in his hand: "You Dan Sawyer? They desecrated you and said you'd be here with a kid. You need to call the Miller office."

"Let's see what they want."

After some time, and introductions, he passed the phone to me.

"Kid, you're not serious!" Mac's voice said on the other side of the line. "I don't give a damn how young or green you are. Slip up one more time and you're gone, you hear me – gone! Make a mess with the show, and I'll tear your balls off. But OK, you've been good on damage control and brought the show home. Run out on me like that when you have to do a job for others, that's inexcusable. I don't give a fuck what Mitch, Brady, your old man or even the president's private advisor think. You're in my business now and if you've become even the smallest cog in the machinery, you've got to do your stuff or everything will come to a halt!

You're in my office tomorrow at 08:00 sharp, to sign your new contract – or you'll never be seen or heard in the industry again."

Then he hung up.

"There's gonna be hell to pay at Max's office tomorrow..." I started, but dad interrupted me.

"He wants you in the office only tomorrow?"

"Does that mean anything?"

"Sure it does," dad said, "he's giving you a day off to prepare a waterproof story to sell him. He likes you, maybe even trusts you to do a good job. Let's get ready for your meeting – and stay away from Hill, she's a backstabber."

**** *A day at the office*

It was exactly as dad said. Max was pleased, because it was the wrestling guys, not the lab rats, who controlled the crowd. He agreed to the idea of setting up Ducky's living lab, but didn't really want outside guys, not knowing the industry, taking over. I mean, he was ready to change so many things, break so many rules, but he wanted kayfabe to continue and he respected the business itself, so he wasn't about to change it into a Disney production... although he was

ready to make it a kiddie show. Still, he couldn't just admit he's proud of me... he had to chew me out.

“What were you thinking?!?” He yelled at me, when his secretary opened the door to his office.

“Now Nik (*Titus' real name*) is broken and won't be any good for at least half a year because that dick-face punk roughed him up legit. Was that your doing?”

“But...” I started backing to the wall at the onslaught.

“No buts! You've been called up to B shows only because Titus wanted to do a programme and we had a story line with the two of them becoming a tag team – and you turn it into a shoot to which even a small-town crowd riots!”

“It wasn't like that...” I wanted to explain.

“No, it wasn't. It was even worse!!! You somehow pulled a show out of your ass, that I can't put on the air, because it's too violent. What were you thinking – a girl bleeding because a known superstar hit her in the face!”

“That was not...” but he just didn't let me get a word in edge wise.

“It wasn't. It wasn't a show you were supposed to do. We want to do family friendly shows, like the feel-good moments you were creating with that best birthday ever bull shit years ago. Instead we get a bleeding pregnant girl losing her child in front of a live audience and a guy who's pulled out of the ring, because he's getting a knee surgery! What are we going to have for a feud now?”

That's where I knew I mustn't stay quiet anymore, that was my spot where I had to show I've got a storyline to cover it all up.

“So, what! I got it covered. Titus was old news anyway!”

Finally, he eased up and sat down. “Old news, is he. Sit down kid. You better got a good story for me, before I chop your balls off and feed them to my fish.” *He really did have a huge aquarium in the office.*

“Here's the deal! Titus is out, but his son jumped in the ring and got involved anyway, so he's the one to carry the feud forth. This way you get two fresh guys the public isn't sick of yet and you can start developing a whole soap opera around them. Just don't let anybody now Spike and Smack are brother and sister. Let's make Dick the jock who stole Smack from Spike and got her pregnant, but he'd drop her like a ton of bricks as soon as she'd tell him about the baby. Spike, still in love with her, would take good care of her and he just couldn't stand Titus smacking her, or her being with Dick. That's why he jumped in the ring with an agenda of his own.”

“You're so full of shit kid! You haven't planned any of this.”

“No, I haven't. I wanted this cocky bodybuilder showing off a ring veteran such as Titus, but Titus started the shoot. He hit Smack legit and caused her to lose a baby nobody even knew she was carrying. I had to wrap it up somehow and the guys from the analytics (*I remembered not to call them lab rats in front of Max*) haven't helped any. They wanted to portray Smack as a slut and have the crowd turn on her. Whose lame idea was that? Did Steve make that up?”

Now Max finally opened up. He buzzed for the secretary again, “Make us a drink, Dolores, will you. And hold my calls. The shit-kid here and I got a lot to talk about. And tell Steve to come up here as soon as he can.”

The drinks were here almost instantaneously.

“OK, kid, I guess your dad thought you some things... or you’ve really got the smarts for the job. Either way, I see you can be good for the business.”

I coughed when I took a sip of the ‘drink’ Dolores gave me.

“Don’t worry, this will put some hair on your chest. It’s the rum barrel, my own recipe: shot of Bacardi, shot of Malibu, two shots of Añejo ripened in a barrel, four shots of coke and a lemon twist.

But to answer your question, no, it wasn’t Steve who came up with the idea. It was Hill. I guess she got fed up with you and wanted to sabotage you. You were spilling more ideas than sperm with her around. And she wanted to use them and get rid of you along the way.

Anyway, don’t worry about her, she’s not going to be with us for long. We’ll write you up a new storyline and reveal your daddy and get rid of her.

No, not only on account of you. She screwed many people, even some wrong ones... and she was doped up.”

“She cut into the merch sale?”

“I’m impressed, Timmy, is it... I was sure you weren’t listening at that diner with Ducky.”

Oh, I was... listening, watching and remembering it all. Also, Dad filled me in, because Mitch was telling him about somebody forcing his way in the action figure sales and that’s the only thing Hill was showing legit interest in around the company.

“Yes. She already has a sex doll made in her image and wants to sell that. Fine... but she should give me the percentage for giving her air time to promote her body for the doll to be sold. She doesn’t want to do this. On the other hand, she thinks she’s good with the producer, so apart from wanting 30% from my end, she also wanted 30% off his end. She’s just too greedy for her own good, so we’re dumping her. And with you, she just proved it!”

He then spilled the beans, on what was going on, before Steve would come.

“So, it’s not that we don’t trust Dan. He’s got his head in the right place and knows not to screw with us when it comes to business. We tease him with the cheating about the gate, but you can make sure he can’t take a nickel without us knowing about it – so he doesn’t.

You, we knew nothing about, except that you’re a horny kid with good intuition about what to do.

I guess Mitch really started liking you after that Brogan riot at the garden. He was always watching over you and agreed you’ve got good ideas and the crowd connects well. So, I got Steve to follow you around and he did the statistics of what you do. It showed promise, but we wanted to know more about you and what better way to get anything out of you than with Hill? She was spreading her legs for anybody and anything anyway... she’s just a horny nymph really, but as you were inexperienced, we knew you’d tell her anything and everything even before you realized you were thinking that.

It was a good test to see what your thinking process was and also, how you’d react if anything went wrong. So, we got Steve’s boys to throw the crowd the other way, to test you in crises.

Brady was there for damage control, Mitch was there, ‘cos he likes you... and things got real.

I’m sorry for Titus, he was a good and reliable man, but I guess he couldn’t handle his kids being in the business. Can’t say I blame him. Don’t know how I’d react if it happened to Suzy. But then again, we’re not friends here, I’m the boss and have to make sure the business is making money. So, I can understand his fatherly outrage, but can’t approve of such a shoot. He

almost broke the neck of the dick-face. And causing Smack to lose the kid... that's just sick! But then again, she was way too young to have a child. Hope she can bounce back... which won't be easy with her old man being her enemy.

Anyway, you somehow pulled it off and Smack covering her old man was pure genius. The crowd rioted, but you gave them something to make them feel good even in the face of a bloody massacre.

You being there as the ref was very wise and getting the other ref out was good thinking. He was just lost, as nobody expected a shoot.

You're quick on your feet and I bet we can work well together, but you got to clean up your act.

Apart from trimming your horn and probably giving you a handful of diseases along the way, Hill also got you high and that's not good. I gotta warn you, I don't mind the guys in the ring doing what they think they should do with their bodies. It's not that I don't care about them, but hey, they are grown up, their bodies are their livelihood, and whatever they need to do to keep them going and performing – it's their choice.

But when it come to the creative team, refs, and managers at ring side – you're the guys that make sure everything is alright even if the talents screw up. So, you've got to keep a level head, so if you're hooked, you're out. I don't want any psychedelic crap, I want steady hits. Iron Butterfly is known for one song only, Kenny Rogers for a whole bunch of them. Do you understand?"

It's not that I was into Iron Butterfly or Kenny Rogers, but given the choice of the two, I'd prefer an ugly old teacher scraping her nails along the blackboard.

"I know what you mean. High spots make headlines, but mid-carders keep the business going, right?"

He stood up to pour himself another drink, "Drink up, kid, there's plenty more."

"Sorry, I don't mind waiting a bit longer for my chest hair to grow."

Now he came to me and patted me on the back, "You do catch on quick. Here, I've got some beer too."

And he pulled two Coors out of the fridge.

Dolores knocked on the door, "Mr. Miller, it's Steve Hunters."

"Show him in, please."

And that's how I became one of the lab-rats. Basically, I kept doing what I've started alongside my father, only with more creative and less appearances. I kept listening to plot lines, stories, scripting the matches and promos... However, the agenda wasn't always to get as many people in the building or behind the screens hooked. The real purpose of the lab was something I only find out about latter, but until I did, I just remembered Max's words: "Don't question the things you don't understand, unless they're paid for out of your own pocket."

That was, I guess, his motto, ever since he struck a deal with Ducky in the late 70s, but then again, I was getting enough money now, not to be hot-headed if my ideas weren't listened to.

Chapter IV: The guy who controls the crowds

* *Becoming a rat*

“Well, if it isn’t the clever Steve Hunters. The guy who can predict the crowd response with the accuracy... what’s that word I’m searching for... the accuracy of an electron microscope operated by a blind guy... oh, you get the idea.”

Steve was looking down.

“And even after you’ve hunted down your pray, got the info from the deepest inside sources possible, sent your stodes... you couldn’t outwit a kid. I really don’t know why Ducky is paying you, if you can’t give anything in return.”

“You know very well, Mr Miller, why I am here, in your industry. And I can tell you, I was misled by my informant.”

“I don’t want your excuses.”

“I’m not offering any. I don’t work for you.”

“But you’re influencing my business and I’m holding you responsible for that.”

“As you wish. You know the deal better than I do, you were the one drafting and signing it.”

“But,” Max went on, “you nearly ruined the whole show, got one of my well know talent into hospital and his girl to miscarry. I’m personally holding you responsible for sending your stodes to the ring side, messing with the work of my guys, causing so much hardship!”

For the first time, I’ve got to witness a behind the scene... I wouldn’t even call it a power-struggle, more of the backstage politics and agendas... And I was impressed how Steve held his own and never even raised his voice. He was a machine. Nerves of steel and bowling balls between the legs.

“Sure, and you forgot the little bird that got its nest with three eggs crushed on the tree in the parking lot. Now that’s tragic.” Steve replied.

“I’ll have you pulled off this project if you don’t toe the line.”

“I’m not scared of leaving... you’re scared of me taking my budget with me when I slam the door.”

Max’s face went from pretend furious, to legit furious, and I got to learn how pissed off he really is, when he starts talking with that honey voice of his.

“OK, let’s not fight. I admit, your guys were trying to tip the crowd one way, but had nothing to do with the shoot fight.”

“Good. Now tell me, why did you call me here? I sent the report yesterday evening already, but the final numbers won’t be done until next week.”

“I wanted to introduce this guy to you – he’s Dan’s boy and was doing his job the other night on a pro level. He’s the horse Ducky wants us to mount and you wanted to sabotage.”

Steve looked at me and said: “Willing to dump Hill? Otherwise we can forget the whole deal.”

Finding out how she backstabbing me, it really was an easy choice, but I didn’t want to make it look easy. I wanted to play the game too.

“You guys need me, so I’ll have whoever I want to hump.”

“Good for you kid, get a whore, get syphilis, get a carpenter to put your balls in a vice, set your pubic hair on fire for a laugh... I don’t care. Just make sure the only sounds coming from your mouth are pitiful moans of a boy who’s to childish to shake my hand and become a man – because we struck a deal on conditions I proposed.”

“Just tell me, Mr Hunters,” I kept on, “Before I we strike an agreement – what did she tell you about the show? Your guys were paler than bleached chalk dipped into correctional fluid.”

“OK, I guess if anybody, you’ve got the right to know. She said you’re ready to give Titus’ kids a push, with the girl becoming the first real women superstar... I mean on the level that could compete for ratings with the likes of Wigs, Louis Brown, or her dad... And that she’d make a deal with the company producing her blow-up dolls, to make one based on the girl. Hill’d get 60% share from the new line of dolls. But to make it work, the girl couldn’t go into mainstream as a face... she had to be a slut, so people would want to buy porn merch. Seeing how the original story was that Titus and Dick should have a longer programme together, and how Titus’ girl was always portrayed as sexy and able, it seemed it would be easy to do this... only a hint at the first show, with more and more stooges at each following show, until the snowball rolled down the hill.

Only, Hill didn’t care to find out, what the actual story between you guys was. There was genuine heat between Titus and Dick she never picked up. Oh, and I found out, the blow-up doll was a lie. She just cared about her doll, so she wanted to blacken the girl and get her off TV, so she’d get more air time for herself.”

“Like I’ve said. I’ll hump whoever I want, but I don’t want to hump Hill anymore,” stretching out my right hand to shake with Steve.

Oh, how I underestimated these guys. Sure, if they wanted to have a whole programme, having just two guys at the first show would be enough. They were starting a movement and with each show it would grow, until the crowd would think they really came up with it on their own.

Max said: “Welcome to the analytics, kid, from now on, you’re a nerd in a role of a rich kid manager, who just got rid of his sexy mammy. You and Steve make it into a storyline. And Steve, when will you start jerking my chain back when I jerk yours?” Max said, trying to make his previous outburst seem like a rib, but we all knew it wasn’t.

“You can jerk mine all you want, Max, but I ain’t touching yours.”

“All right. Steve, get the kid to know about the analytics, he’ll be on Ducky’s budget too, the rest of his gang is still payed with wrestling contracts... except for that kid who botched and broke Chief’s nephew his neck. He’s gone. We’re working on POT now, but two weeks after POT you need to get the story over, on how you ditched Hillary and soon after, you’ll take the new guy on a house show tour. Make it good.

Oh, and kid, about Hillary... she’s leaving the company. Help her understand that as she doesn’t know yet. The rest of the guys already got what’s coming to them, as they did attend the debriefing yesterday... except for the Gladionne family. Even Spike is still in hospital where they took Titus and the girl.”

OK, so everybody not at the hospital at that point already knew that they’re either fired (Bass for botching), or moving on with the stories (Smooth), or being punished for hurting a guy (Dick’s push got cancelled, so he’ll be jobbing for a year) or retired (Stevenson losing his

partner just felt, there's not much more he could do in the ring, so the Bounty Hunters were both out of the picture). I should have been here yesterday, to talk to the guys... guess I'll just have to catch up latter. I got promoted to be a lab rat and tonight, I have the task of telling Hill, she's fired.

That night I went into the motel room like a real man, turned her towards the wall, bent her over to prove who was the boss. And was sitting in a chair a few moments later, Hill had me barking like a dog, and asked while taking my dick out of her mouth: "Did Max say anything about me?"

"Yeah, that you're fired."

I just felt her jerking hand tighten up and she just snapping my member down, biting my ball sack... *I don't know for how long I was passed out, but my dong was useless for a few days.*

She was gone though and in kayfabe, the story will change, but I still had a few weeks to come up with a new ending.

**** Back to school**

The day after, with an ice-pack on my crotch and visibly hurt... don't want to explain again why; I sat down with Steve from the analytics – yup, the guys really don't want to be called lab rats, and during the day I understood why.

"Timmy," Steve was probably the only guy who consistently called me by my name and never referred to me as Kid, "I know you're eager to start working, but let now you're under a different contract, so sign first and let me tell you then what we do."

I was surprised at this statement, but sure, I signed.

"You don't want to read it first?" Seteve asked.

"Why? Is there anything special?"

"Yes, yes there is. There is a confidentiality clause. There's things here, you may not say even to your father. The real things we do here... under the Miller – Rockshield agreement of 1978."

"What are those things?"

"Well, since you've already signed, I can tell you and if you tell anybody, we'll sue you for 5000 times what your ten-year pay would be. Welcome aboard."

I thought he was joking, so I smiled a bit.

"Just look at article 7, second paragraph."

If the contracted party, at any time – while contract is in power, or 80 years afterwards - breaches the confidentiality of this agreement, that party will be obliged to pay the equivalent of ten-year's worth of the agreement, multiplied by the estimated damage done to the contracting party, which can be at factor 5.000 (five thousand), 10.000 (ten thousand), or 100.000 (hundred thousand) times the amount.

"So, shhhhh, don't tell anybody, not even your dad... no, wait... you can tell him, he also signed a contract." *He was a lab rat too, yup, without me knowing.*

I swallowed the lump in my throat, asking scared: "So, what's this secret, I'm not to say to anybody?"

“It’s what we do. Like, the other night, I’m sorry about the girl losing a child, but we didn’t really care about the show or ratings. We wanted to see, how wild we could make the crowd. Based on the info we had, our best bet was, to try and make the new guy’s escort like a slut. But then, it all turned into a mess, because it was a shoot fight. So you see, we’re not really interested in the industry, but in reactions of the crowds. Still, we need good people within the business, to make it happen, so we want people like you on our team.”

“So, what is it we do here?”

“Glad you feel a part of the team already. We are making public opinions! You know... when you get a big crowd, there’s always one guy starting a slow clap and everybody picks it up... or there’s always one guy, starting a chant and everybody picks up the chant. Those guys were never random.

In communist countries, these are party member, usually youth, sent to start a landslide of emotion in the masses. Here in the west, it’s paid stodes. Comes down to the same thing. The person wanting to control the crowd makes them tip one way or the other. And what better way to practice, than with a wrestling match and bookers, who already go for face/heel turns, tipping the crowd over.”

This got me a bit scared, thinking we’re doing some political covert opps, “But isn’t it illegal?”

“Immoral, maybe. Illegal – no. Still, you don’t want to get caught doing it, because then you lose credibility.”

“So, there are others doing it too?”

“Yes, Timmy, there are. Long time ago, there was a guy called Machiavelli, who wrote a book to the new ruler of Florence, exposing the secrets of rulership. Basically, he said – do what you have to do! He didn’t bother with the crap of what a ruler should be like: noble, god fearing, good, just... he knew every ruler was just a man like all the rest. So, he said: be the guy to get the job done, the rest is just the public image. It may have been an inconvenient truth to hear, but it was a fact. Sure enough, people called Machiavelli evil, twisted, corrupt... but his work was well studied and applied by many.

Then there were guys like Nietzsche, who, again, said that living for the afterlife according to the ideals and godly morals was what it was... but people should live for today. You’ve probably heard, what doesn’t destroy me, makes me stronger? That was him. Also, he thought, the society needs an overhaul. He said that mass culture – in that day it was due to theatre, opera, books and press, was making people mediocre. And that it was up to individuals to make something about it, once they rise above the mediocracy.

Here in the US, we took it way beyond that. While in dictatorships, like Nazi Germany or Soviet Russia, they were using the iron fist and terrorizing people who were out of line, in the US we went about it the other way.

You know of Pearl Harbour, don’t you? You know that after that we went to war and won it? But do you know, we might have not gone to war were it not for Pearl Harbour?

Now that’s something people don’t really consider. The thing is, that most Americans did not want to go to war. They remembered the Great War and the economic collapse after that. They didn’t want US to go to Europe and clean up the shit of others. The people even voted for Roosevelt because he was against US involvement in a European war. But what happened – US entered the war, and the people were all for it!

Roosevelt was preparing the people to enter the war. He had an Office for Facts and Figures, which was almost his personal propaganda machine to have the people think what he wanted them to think. He tipped the nation's opinion from anti-war into pro-war. The only difference is, in politics you call it differently. You don't book a war, you handle public relations. That's what he was good at. That's what every promoter is good at, otherwise he's out of the business.

And that's what we are doing. We're handling public relations. And as the wrestling fans are Americans, we can see which stuff will and which won't work.

That's why FDR ignored the warning about Japan attacking, just like Stalin ignored warnings about Germans attacking. The main difference, however, was, that FDR had to have the US majority behind him, while Stalin wanted to be attacked, so that whatever he did in return, would not be aggression beyond his borders, but a retaliation and retribution."

I was in shock, mostly because he was firing facts at me I knew nothing about, and could barely connect them into a fragmented mess. I guess that's what happens, if you don't get enough education.

"So, what is expected of you, keep doing your job, be good at it, and from time to time we'll tell you to do things in a certain way. If you're clever enough, you'll catch on and we won't have to explain why. If you're dumb enough to not understand, there's no point in explaining."

Finally, something I understand – a job to do.

"Your first task, Timmy, will be a project concerning Jason 'Fist' Armstrong. We're giving him a gimmick of a camouflaged hunter/guerrilla fighter... something like Rambo. We want to make him a face from the very beginning, even though the crowd doesn't really know him. He doesn't have to be good in matches, but must appeal to the kids, so merch will be sold. The word was – stuff it down everybody's throat until they start liking the guy. But the bottom line is, he has to be over before the next POT.

You've got three months before his debut – work with him, just keep in mind, he's greener than spring leaves with gangrene.

You'll be on the project with Barney Welch, he's the trainer in the developmental and you'll take the guy to a few house shows in some of the small towns. You can manage him, or you can be the ref in his matches. Doesn't matter, those will be dark matches.

While you're doing that, you'll have to learn about the Vietnam war, I guess your dad can give you some useful information about what was like over there.

Remember, it's not the truth we want. The truth in our business is – guys go out to the ring to do the show and entertain people who pay them. It's finding out what the crowd wants, so you can make them go home happy or thirsty for more – or both. It's the same with political agendas that were involved in the war... sure, there's facts and truth somewhere in there, but we don't care about the war, just the attitude the people had towards it."

"Why? I mean, the guy's a veteran. Most fans will respect him for that. He's based on Rambo, so most people will love him for that – if he's plausible. And the people who won't like his character... if we feel the crowd is going one way or the other, we can flip him from face to heel until he's over. So why... OH!" I've said, seeing Steve's look. "Sorry, I'll just listen and try to catch on."

"Got me scared there for a moment, you'd be flunking the first minute! So, we are doing this to make sure the character of a war veteran will go over with the kids. Why? Well, what do boys like most? Superheroes, cowboys and soldiers. Cowboy characters are too easy, so can

mass produce them. Superheroes are impossible, because you can't prepare live shows with them... so we're after the soldier image. Fist will be our Rambo, a human with a superhero status, who kicks ass in the ring. The ring philosophy is something you can handle now. The background story has to be waterproof."

"But, isn't it simple? People just kinda hate Vietnam veterans, because that was a war we didn't win, so they don't want to think about it much, but respect the individual guys for the guts they've shown, right?" I've asked, remembering dad told me that quite often, before he returned to the ring.

"See, those are the things you need to know, need to answer, and need to incorporate in the character of our wrestler. Remember, now you're not just making storylines, you need to prepare promos as well, to build those story lines."

"Like I've said," Steve went forth, "get this guy over. If possible in the live crowds, but most definitely with the kids.

In short, we want to have high ratings and we want to have good sale of merch. But to do that, we must give the people a veteran they want. So, how did Stallone do this in Rambo?

The message was right. An average Joe, with a life story that most of us could have had, trying to find something left in his life with a meaning... and a bastard sheriff pushing his buttons, until he couldn't control his rage anymore. In a way, Rambo is very much like The Incredible Hulk. When Hulk mad, Hulk smash! When Rambo gets mad, Rambo destroys people making him mad.

You get a guy, who's fighting the law enforcer, but is in fact a tragic character, a good guy. That's why the people are not afraid of him, not against him... they are rooting for him, because he's the hero.

Is that saying the law is bad? Should we become vigilantes and control the guys in uniforms? Should we fear our veterans because they were trained to kill and can't control the rage, with cops not able to protect us from them?

No, it's saying – treat a guy with respect and you won't have any trouble. But if you're a bastard, you'll sooner or later come across a guy who won't put up with your crap.

Will we achieve the same with Fist Armstrong?

It's up to you to give it your best shot. To make him go over with the TV audience, to help the sale of his merch and to make a main event star out of him! He's never been in the industry before, so in three months you start taking him to house shows, but within half a year, he's got to be ready for TV. Max is paying quite a lot of money to see it happen, Huey's paying me to make it happen the way I described it, and we all agreed you're the natural to do this, as we've been watching you for some time, so you'll get a budget of your own, out of Huey's pocket."

I was almost able to follow... so many information...

It was much later I realized Steve was a fountain of knowledge with a firm agenda and his tactic to subdue you was to overwhelm you with information until you just gave up and agreed with what he wanted you to do. I'm sure he realized I was too young to make heads or tails of what he told me, but he explained exactly what this lab was set up for. Experimenting with people's reactions.

We used it for marketing, for ratings, for getting a monopoly over pro wrestling industry, and even to effect the public opinion in the politics, when push came to shove.

But at that age and level of the lack of knowledge, I didn't understand. And Steve was trying to make me his right hand, because he needed somebody he could trust, so having a young guy, devoted to work and with the talent for feeling the masses, I was it.

"I get it, I guess... but isn't that influencing people's opinions about issues?"

"Who do you think, we sell our product to the people anyway? Why would anybody want to see a fight, that they believe is set up?"

I mean, as early as 1941 they were making comments about it in movies. In *Shadow of Thin Man*, Nick (main character) plane out said: I saw how the match turns out during the rehearsal!

Yet, people have kept coming back for more wrestling. And that's why we got to make our product good and keep changing it with time. Making people's minds up for them, so they'd keep watching. People are wising up on everything with the VCRs and stuff. So we have to keep one step ahead of them, telling them what they'll want tomorrow.

That's your job, having teens like the product, making their minds up for them, about wrestling, about characters, about their attitude to what it all represents."

I wasn't even listening at that point... maybe my dick hurt too much, or there was just so much more information than I expected in a completely different way from what I thought I'd do... I mean, Roosevelt and Stalin? Pearl Harbor, Japan and Nazi Germany? And a Vietnam veteran on top of it all. I've heard about all of it, but had no clue what it was all about! I hate to admit it, but dad really was right. I'm nothing but a kid.

"OK, I'll go find Barney Welch and the Fist to see where we stand."

"Be at the garages first thing tomorrow, to meet up with them," Steve said, refereeing off course to the ring in the hangers LLW used for training the guys and gals.

*** *At the Gym*

As soon as I got out of the building, I grabbed a hotdog and sat down on a bench in the shade. I took out my block and pencil and wrote down the names Steve was telling me about, before I forget them. I knew they were famous historical people, but I knew nothing more, so I decided to go to the library and check out the encyclopaedia, so I'd have at least a rough idea of what I was being told.

Took me much longer than I thought and I almost got caught in a loop. You see, when you start finding out about such influential men, you just want to dig deeper, because there's so much they did. But I didn't have the time. I still had to worry about this Armstrong character and about my own story line – how to write Hill off and make me look strong. And before I knew it, the library was closing and I was on the way home, to get some shut eye, but just lied with eyes wide open the whole night, because although I didn't understand them fully, Steve's words were burring around my rains looking for a place to land.

Next morning, not too early though, I got a cab to the gym and asked the driver to stop for a burger along the way. I don't know if Hill bit as hard as she could or not, and snapped the dick in half, but with the pain I'm feeling, I'm just glad it's all in place. I know it has no bones, but whatever's hard, can break... maybe I'll have to see a doctor about it, if it doesn't get better in a few days... but I'm not missing my first visit to the gym, to see the new guy, I'm supposed to work with.

Anyway, I arrived at the garage. The guy at the gate of the premises told me to go to the small hanger that used to be the wardrobe for the mechanics at the hanger. That meant Jason is not allowed to be in company of other guys – yet.

As soon as I walked in, I saw this sculptured muscular oiled up guy, with a slightly round elderly man I kind of recognised, so I guessed that was Barney and Jason.

“Hello! Steve from the analytics sent me.”

“A lab rat? Great... I need help in the ring, not a guy who’s full of shit. Look kid, you still look young, don’t care about your fancy schools, you got to get your hands dirty – so get in the ring.”

I wouldn’t mind going in the ring... I wasn’t scared of bumps, but my crotch sure as hell didn’t feel up to it. On the other hand, after the head full of Steve, some wrestling might just straighten me out again – this, at least, I knew how to do and have done it before. So, I took off my jacket, shoes and socks, took off my shirt and pants, so I stood there in the ring in my boxers and vest, ready for a lock up.

“That’s a nice surprise. You’ve done some high-school wrestling kid? Didn’t expect a lab rat to get ready to wrestle. Stay lose and follow my lead – I gotta show this goldbrick here what’s pro-wrestling.”

So, we locked up. He pushed my right hand down with his left, pushed my left hand aside with his right, grabbed between the legs and body slammed me gently on the back.

“Perfect! You saw this goldbrick? The kid didn’t fight my lead. He stood there like we’re really locking up and he even pushed off, when I started lifting him, so it was more of a dance than a fight.” He was telling Armstrong this, who looked pissed off, and added to me, “Have you been training?”

“Did a few matches already, but never trained real wrestling, or other combat sports.”

“That’s what makes it easy then.” He turned to Armstrong again. “You see goldbrick, in pro-wrestling the people don’t really fight each other. I know, you’ve got reflexes and they tell you – if a guy wants to pick you up, you should make it impossible. You don’t want the other guy to toss you, to throw you... but in pro-wrestling, you want to. And you want to make it easy on him, so nobody botches the move, or else people can get hurt.”

“Right...” he growled.

“And you, kid, there’s some more boots in the lockers. Don’t want to stomp your toes by accident. You seem hurt enough already. You feel like a cow kicked you in the groin while you were milking her.”

Huh, now that was quite a diagnosis I’ve got, from a guy, who just grabbed my crotch.

“I’ll look at that later, if you want.”

Having an elderly fattish man look at my privates didn’t sound appealing, but then again, he obviously knew what he was talking about and maybe that way I can skip a doctor.

“So, goldbrick, did you see what the kid did? We have to be like acrobats... you know, work together. Sure, you might fall and it would hurt a bit, but those are the bumps people just have to take in this business. But no injury will come from it, unless you sandbag a move!”

“Just stop calling me goldbrick. I’m George Johnson, Jason Armstrong is OK to, as it’s my ring name... even Fist is fine... but stop calling me goldbrick.”

Is that why he’s pissed off?

“Make me!”

And they locked up again.

I could see George trying to really put Barney in a hold and hurt him, to really make him shut up, although I personally thought goldbrick really fit. The guy was built like Adonis and looked like he could be the company's golden boy, but moved like a stack of bricks and was probably even stiffer.

Finally, Barney let him apply a headlock.

"Call me goldbrick one more time, and I'll snap your neck, you hear me?"

Barney just shoved his thumb up the guy's ass and he let go of the neck in surprise.

"No go, goldbrick... I'll call you whatever I want, and you'll learn whatever I tell you. I get my percentage off the money you're making, so be sure, I'll make you wrestle!"

George turned around to punch Barney, but he just grabbed his hand, twisted it behind the back, pressing the musclebound body to the ground with the face foaming with rage and pain.

"Now, do I have your word you won't try to punch me again, or must I rip your hand off to make sure you won't?"

The bodybuilder was tapping hard on the mat, so I thought I'd make a joke of it and started being a ref.

"Hey, ease up, he's got the foot on the rope. Come on Barney, loosen the hold. 1, 2, 3, I'm warning you, I'm gonna DQ you. Come on, 1, 2, 3, 4... Hey, his foot's on the rope."

"Ask him, ref," Barney was yelling at me, "ask him!"

"Do you give up?"

"YES! I give up."

"That's not what I wanna hear," Barney said. "Will you ever again try to punch me?"

"Will you, George Johnson, ever again try to punch your trainer Barney Welsh if he lets go of the hold!"

"I'll kill you both... AAAAAAAAARGHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Wrong answer!" Barney said and let him go. "You'll never try to hurt your opponent in the ring and you will respect and listen to the people that are breaking you in."

Armstrong was huffing and puffing and wanted to say something, but he just couldn't find the words. Barney said: "Did he scare you kid? He just threatened your life!"

I just climbed outside the ring and stood in the corner yelling: "Tag me, tag me!"

I saw the smile on Barney's face and he reached around for the tag.

I returned to the ring, started facing Armstrong, who was in tears of blind rage, swinging with the hand Barney didn't twist around the back, to grab me.

I just slid down, pulled his leg to make him fall and put him in a toehold.

He started yelling again and this time Barney came in as the ref.

"Will you still be such a jerk?" Barney asked. "Enough kid, he's had enough."

So, I let go and Jason "Fist" Armstrong was just lying on his belly sobbing his eyes out, a broken man.

I understood – he needed his ego to be broken to start working. Lucky for me he didn't know how to fight, so my schooling was enough. And once he realized he's helpless even against a kid, his mind snapped.

"Leave him sobbing, let's see what's wrong with your crotch kid."

So, we went to the showers, where Barney said: "You're OK. What are you doing with the lab rats kid? Pull your shorts down."

And he started feeling around my bruised private parts.

“How the fuck did this happen? Were you hanging weights on it?”

“Nah, I told a woman she got fired during a blowjob.”

“Who’d fire a woman during a blow job?”

“Nah, she was giving me one, when I told her the news she got fired.”

“Dumb! OK, the bite shouldn’t be a problem. There was no blood, but you’ll have to be careful about the snapped dong. If it feels like getting hard, but doesn’t start standing up, you should go and see a doctor. And I hope you smashed in the teeth of the bitch who did this.”

“Thanks for advice, no I didn’t, although I should have some time ago.” I’ve said. “I’m Timmy Sawyer, I’m here to write up a storyline and script the matches for goldbrick over there.”

“Sawyer? Dan’s boy?”

“Yup!”

“No wonder then. You’re really all right, kid! Say hello to your old man. Hope his knee isn’t giving him much trouble.”

“Thanks.”

We went back to the ring, where George was trying to sit in the ring, but his butt hurt too much, from the oil check he got (that’s the thumb in the ass)... and still sobbing.

“I wanna quit!” He was saying. “I’m no good for any of you.”

“Listen up, goldbrick, you’ve got the look that can make you a ton of money. But wrestling is an art form. Like I’ve said – it’s like acrobats in the circus. They take high risks, risk the life and body performing, hurt like hell – especially when something goes wrong... and they trust each other! You’ve got to learn to trust me. Sure, I’ve hurt you – I could have done worse. Even the kid here can lick your sorry ass. But that’s not what we’re after. We want to teach you, how to work in the ring. How to move, how to react to moves of others. OK? So, don’t fight us, work with us!”

“HOW?”

This time I stepped in and said: “Just watch. Barney, let’s lock up. I get you in a side headlock, you shove me to the ropes and duck, when I come back with a flying crossbody, slam me.”

George looked at me, when Barney came to lock up.

“What are you talking about?” George asked, finally realising, he couldn’t keep up even if we are demonstrating it to him.

I was selling the slam like it broke my lower back and Barney started stomping me.

“Boston crab for submission,” I’ve said.

Barney grabbed my legs and rolled me over and I tapped out, with the facial expression of agony’s dying mother in pain.

“See kid, that’s how he’s been hurting me all day! I quit.”

“Idiot!” I said while getting up, “I told him to do it to me! Remember, I was calling the shots!”

Barney just held his head: “You know nothing of the business, do you?”

“It’s fake, you don’t fight for real and you know who’ll win before the match, but can make big bucks if you look the part. So, I don’t get it, why are we hurting each other during practice.”

I stood up, reviling I’m not hurt at all (at least not from the slam and crab): “One more statement like that, and I’m really gonna hurt you! Wrestling is not competing, but it’s not fake!”

People believe the guys in the ring are fighting for real and they got to make it look good and convincing. Trust me, taking bumps hurts. If the guy's good and not stiff it's not bad, if either of the guys doesn't know how to do it, it can hurt as hell. You're told in advance how the fight is booked, so you know who'll win and approximately what the finish will be... still one of the guys in the ring calls the shots and spots. Usually the heel – that's the villain fighting the good guy, face. That's how guys can prepare for the next move and do it day in day out without hurting themselves – although pain is always involved.

Do you think you understand?"

So, we went at it again... Barney and George should lock up, but as George's arms hurt legit, he was barely moving and putting in any effort. Barney said: "Spine buster!" and grabbed him around the waste, picked him up in the bearhug and slammed him. This time, not that all the talk helped any – Fist was just too tired to even react, there was no resistance and Barney was able to perform the move even if Fist was basically sandbagging it. After landing on the floor, he said: "That was better, at least you didn't resist. Did it hurt you?"

"Not much... can you guys teach me? I mean really teach me and make me wrestler? Will I have to go through this hell all the time?"

"We better," I said, "because just now you were supposed to help by jumping, so that Barney wouldn't have to pick you all up."

"See? The kid just explained it... it's me that's hurting much more than you are right now. I could have put my back out for good, while you'd just get a few bruises. Lucky for you, the money you're getting paid and the money we're getting paid to do it, means the guys upstairs have decided and we have no choice but to make you the next shining star in the ever-expanding universe of wrestling."

"And remember, to me, you're still nothing but a gold brick until you learn how to move and work in the ring. Now hit the shower."

While he was under the shower, I asked Barney: "You think he will be ready in three months?"

"That's like extracting powdered milk from a dead ox. No chance in hell it could be done."

"That's the deadline for him to go public."

"Kid, you gotta get us more time!"

"They said they want his merch on sale, and soon. By that time, the guy has to be over already!"

This was a laugh, full of disbelief, but also of genuine amusement.

"This guy never stood in the ring. Do they know it? Kid, you gotta talk to them! If I go there, I'll bite somebody's head off... and I'm not talking the sexy bite you've got on the balls, but a real bite, that goes through the jugular."

He was serious. You could see he was an old-school guy. I knew, even if he didn't say a thing – it's not just that Fist had no experience and was no wrestler... who would be prepared to help such a green rookie in his push? The old-school guys believed in the old code – taking your bumps, paying your due, showing your worth and then somebody will take you under the wind on the way out, to get you over by jobbing for you.

The new generation, however, was a different breed. They wanted a shortcut or two and I should be the guy to provide the shortcut by heavily scripting their matches and promos.

Wrestling wasn't a live show any more, it was a money-making TV production. These weren't the old TV days, where you had plywood cut-outs instead of the crowds and two guys getting taped. It is getting taped in front of live crowds, but with Max buying into other territories, the show can be put on anywhere in the states, so the house crowd doesn't know the story line except from the TV show.

So, unlike Barney, who said this couldn't be done, I knew it has to be and with heavy scripting it will be done... I just didn't know exactly how yet.

"I'll go talk to Steve and we'll work something out," I assured Barney.

****** *Project Supernova***

It was late in the evening of a very hard and long and painful day. When I got to my place, I saw many messages on the machine, but just quickly went through them.

There were a few from Bass and Smooth to arrange a meeting – we haven't seen each other since the Titus accident.

Personally, I was more concerned about Smack... I, also, had a soft spot for her... well, with her it wouldn't be soft anymore. I was also wondering what Footlong was doing, but all of that seemed to be the distant pass – and it wasn't even a week since I was so excited about us getting on the programme of B shows.

I'll call my guys back latter and we can get together soon enough, so I can explain the things to them. Honestly, I wasn't even sure what to tell them at this point. I got a programme with goldbrick, had to write Hill off and take care of my guys... I also had to call Steve to tell him the plan was impossible and needs to be changed. The guy really can't get over, so we should make sure there's a good plot line for the whole program ready, to get him over with the crowd. The plan was hatching in my head and I'll work on it tomorrow... today I just wanted to get some shuteye, but there was a call from Brogan on my machine that caught me by surprise.

The unmistakable voice said: "Kid, I've heard they put you planning something big. You'll need names to work with, remember, so don't forget to talk to the locker before you do anything stupid. These ain't the small shows anymore and if you try to fuck up like you did with a has-been such as Titus, that won't fly. Be at the garden locker tomorrow for a talk."

That sounded not just a little bit bossy and unfriendly, it was a down right order backed up with an unspoken threat! So tomorrow, I'll have to be at the garden, with the show beginning in the evening, I have to be there at 6 at the latest... *I was a little scared they'd want to rough me up, but there's no way in hell I could admit that to anyone – not even dad.*

The last message on the machine was from Steve, asking me, how today was and to call him or come down to his office in the morning – and I'll be there in person. There's much I wanted to talk over with him... especially after the Brogan call, but also about the Fist and my status with other guys.

That's just where you could see how young I still was. As soon as something happened, I started reacting and started doing one thing – even if the previous one wasn't over yet. But I was growing up, I was at least aware I had previous obligations that I should do something about.

I hit the pillow and fell asleep, without any pills or recreation drugs, or even a drink... I was just overwhelmed... so much, I was dreaming all of the shit that happened... like a little child, where every single sensation is something new and overwhelming and creeps into the dreams of an empty mind. OK, I had no idea what it was like for a child... never read about it, never talked to people about it and never even considered being a father... which I became much later.

Friday morning, heavy rain, sleepy, and standing in front of the office building where I knew Steve was. Haven't called him, after all, he said I should either call or come – so I came. Should I have called after all? Too late now, let's go in.

“This is a surprise, Timmy, I thought you would just call to set a meeting or something... how come you came in person?”

“It's not gonna be as simple as you thought.”

“What isn't going to be simple?”

“Jason Fist Armstrong... he can't be made a star right away,” I've said without worry, without an apologetic voice, without regret... just as a fact!

Steve looked at me with a look of satisfaction, “Go on!”

“At least not right away and at least not as a face from the get go.”

“Explain.”

“The guy looks like million bucks, but can't move. Training might get him ready to step in the ring, but not to start matches. OK, he might have some squash matches against jobbers, but that's not enough. Sooner or later he'll have to go against other guys, but I'm not sure, who can carry him in a match. So, the early matches will suck – the story has to be simple and we have to make the people interested in him, so we can start flip-flopping.”

“Flip-flopping?”

“Yes, I'd start with him as an unremarkable character, who's squashing jobbers, but can't get over with the crowd ... I'd make him a jock! But when push comes to shove, he'd fail and get crazy... so flip-flopping it from not really loved snobby brat, to a crazed out heel commando, until finally he becomes a patriotic capable defender of justice.”

“Great work. How much time will it take?”

“Three months until he steps in the ring, two months of unsuccessful face, turning heel and becoming commando... after that, I'd give it another three months until the face turn... so all in all, by this time next year, he'd be hugely over.”

“The star Huey Rockshield wants, we just deliver. But yes, your scenario could work. Great job so far. Who do you think he should work with?”

“That's the thing I wanted to talk to you about today. Brogan called me last night...” and I've explained about the message on my machine. “So, I was thinking, that while Brogan is still a heel, we have a short programme of JF Armstrong, the babyface, going after Brogan and failing hard. That could push him heel. Do you think he'd go for it?”

“He might, but you have to convince him. The guy has quite a deal and is looking for a face turn soon. He already told us, he wants us to make out a scenario. He was thinking of one as well, but it wasn't too good. He's not as good at stories as Mitch or Brady are. But Timmy, don't erase that message. You might need it in the court if he roughs you up.”

So, I wasn't the only one thinking that might happen.

“Also, I was thinking of pulling my guys in...”

“You’re getting a budget of 30.000 to use until Fist’s an established heel – you’ve got half a year. Use it on promos, robes, food, stay, transport... everything. The office will take care of Brogan or any other guy with a profiled contract, you’ll keep your steady wage and Armstrong has his own budget anyway. And don’t look at me like that... 30.000 isn’t as much as you might think, but you’ll find that out soon enough. Anything else?”

“So, I can bring anybody in, I see fit?”

“For up to six months and paid out of your 30.000 budget – you can do whatever you feel!

I suggest, though, you go run the idea by Barney, to see if Fist will be prepared in three months.

Oh, and... be careful tonight with Brogan. He’s not mean, but if he loses his temper, and you never know what any of the guys are on, he can snap you like a twig – for real.”

“Thanks, that takes a load off of my mind for tonight. But shouldn’t I talk to Brogan first?”

“Nah, he may have seniority, but if he turns it down, somebody else will accept the program. Just make sure you tell him in a way as if you’re asking him a favour – not as it’s already been decided in advance.”

I wasn’t planning to. Brogan had a long heel run, ever since that night when I was carrying his title and he remembered it well. It felt natural to connect them through a story, but at that point I wasn’t sure he’d go for it. But since he’d just have a story with fist and wouldn’t have to do a job for him, I was confident, I could convince him.

First, though... I had to check if he even made it back, or really quit.

Fist was there, in the garage, but not in the same gym as yesterday. He was in the big hanger, talking to Barney, while they were watching other guys work out moves. It was like entering a commentary booth. Fist wanted to learn the talk, so he could go step by step in the ring, with other guys calling the shots.

“Hey, Barney!”

“Over here kid. Me and goldbrick are just watching wrestlers practice their skills.”

“I’ve been to Steve’s office!”

“Is he fired?” Barney pointed to Fist.

“Fired?” Jason asked.

“Nope, but there’s a slight change of plans... and sorry if you don’t like the name, but you will be Goldbrick for a while!”

“But, I’m, Jason Fist Armstrong. It says so in the contract. Just think of how strange it will be to have a Vietnam veteran called Goldbrick.”

“Just let me tell you the story... and you’ll be getting a girl by your side as well.”

Barney was looking at me with disbelief, when I’ve started explaining, Fist didn’t understand at all: “What do you mean, make him a face, but not all the way?”

“Simple... He’ll be JF Armstrong, nicknamed Goldbrick. Clean cut American college jock fighting jobbers. I’ll manage him myself – as a face manager. Then he’ll have a match with a star. It will probably be Brogan. He’ll beat the crap out of Goldbrick, who’ll finally break the face character, coming out a full-time heel.”

“Ah, so a guy pretending to be a face, but shows his true colours later on.”

“You got it, Barney.”

“And working squash matches against jobbers, only to get squashed by a true heel?!”

“Exactly. Making him a lone wolf in the process.”

Barney patted me on the shoulder: “Way to go, kid, this can be done in three months. He only needs a five-move set to get started in squash matches... and will need to take a few bumps when he gets squashed.”

Now Fist finally had a question: “But if I’m a collage jock, how does that fit in with my Vietnam veteran persona?”

“This is the best part,” I started explaining, “The army financed your collage as you were a veteran. It was also a part of your rehabilitation from being shell shocked by the shit you’ve seen as a commando. But those were things you couldn’t erase from your memory – just wishing them to go away didn’t help. So, when the other wrestler starts beating you, you lose it, drop the façade and become a bad ass commando – Rambo style, kicking everybody and anybody in the process, well, jobbers at least, until a battle royal, where he wins big time.”

“And when people buy the bad-ass story, we make a face turn again,” Barney concluded.

“Sure, a patriotic veteran, a superior fighter going for the gold. If possible, tagging with another face, but somebody who can hold his own, so they can be a part time team on a mission to bring the titles back home, or something similar – and then go their own ways without any of them getting a heel turn when the team breaks apart.”

“Kid, you’re a genius.” Barney was generally excited, “you pulled a plausible and doable story for a guy to become a top star without wrestling a day in his life before, out of your ass.”

“I still don’t get it, but it sounds like you know what you’re doing, so I’ll trust you. But tell me, how do I get my opponents? Who’ll tell them what to do?”

“Don’t worry Goldbrick, they’ll know. They’ll agree to it, it’s their job to wrestle in matches. It’s just the question of names we’ll use.”

“You know kid, the most brilliant part of this is, that he’ll start losing as soon as he meets up known guys. So, nobody will mind working with him, as long as he starts losing and he’ll be made strong in a battle royal. So up to the point when he’s a top name – no name has to do a job for him!” Barney really was impressed, and I also had a story to give forth to Brogan in the evening – especially if it will help him turn face... possibly becoming a tag team champion in the process, before going on with his career.

I was less worried about tonight all of a sudden.

It was almost 6 when I got to the garden. I showed my accreditation and went straight for the locker rooms for heels. Brogan was in a middle of an argument over tonight’s finisher. He knew he must do the job, but he said he’ll never take a submission. The booker was Jeff Gilliard, who had his share of fights with guys like Brogan – guys who had at least some creative control over their careers. This time, again, he had to consider Brogan’s will, “Then don’t submit, pass out!”

“Now that’s got to be the stupidest thing I’ve ever heard, man. The guy puts me in a bearhug and I pass out? Ain’t happening!”

“Look Terence, you’re taking a fall and it’s not going to be via pin-fall. We don’t want you to lose like a man, but like a heel who doesn’t want to get hurt.”

“Do you like getting hurt? I mean, you’re arms and legs are not bent in the way I’m thinking of bending them if you don’t change your story man!”

He meant it, and honestly, I can’t blame him. If this was the beginning of his heel turn – maybe, now, after about three years as a heel and wanting to change face again... no way would

you want to look weak. As I will try to involve him in a yearlong story, I wanted to get on his good side anyway, thus I made a suggestion: “How about a count out?”

Both men couldn't believe their ears and turned towards me: “SHUT UP!” I heard from Jeff, “I'm talking!”

“If there's somebody doing the talking, it's me – you Jeff better just listen and come up with something soon!”

“Like I've said – count out!” I repeated.

This time Brogan pushed Jeff aside: “What'd you mean?”

“Simple – both of you are out of the ring, you start fighting there and at seven you get hit and go down. The other guy barely makes the nine count, you can't make it back on time – you lose. Both can have another match later down the line to settle the score.”

“Stupid kid,” Jeff said, “you don't put a count out on a main event.”

“A main event, and you wanted a top name to pass out or submit to a bear hug... and you're calling me an idiot?”

“The kid's right about the bear hug, but no way am I getting counted out. What else can Stevie Wonderful do in the ring?”

Oh my god, Brogan will be hard to work with, but then again, I can understand why he's reluctant to look weak against Stevie Wonderful. The guy was getting a push, because the company wanted to improve on racial quota, so they wanted more non-Caucasian guys to win. The problem was, only a handful of them were on the level of top performers and Stevie wasn't there yet.

“Let's make it a wonderful fluke then?” I suggested.

“I give up. I gotta tell Stevie what the ending is way before the match, so he can practice it... you've got three more minutes to come up with something, or it's the bear hug... or your pay check.”

WHAM, Jeff hit the metal plate covering the light switches.

“You touch my pay check; your dick ends up as breakfast for my Rottweiler.” Then he turned to me, “The fluke stuff better be good!”

“Simple, Stevie wins by a fluke. It's gotta be a pin fa...”

“I ain't laying down for him!”

“Listen... he gets you in the bearhug, but when you start hitting him to break lose, you knock him senseless and he falls forth slamming the back of your neck on the second turnbuckle. You're both out, but the ref counts to three anyway. You lose, but through a fluke and as Stevie is still heavily dazed from your punches, you stomp the hell out of him after you lose.”

He stopped for a while... then told Jeff: “Tell Stevie to be really careful while falling down with me. This is the ending we're doing.”

Jeff rushed out of his sight... half glad that Brogan decided to call the shot, so he himself won't be blamed, half pissed off about his threats not being at least half as effective as Brogan's. And all pissed at me, for showing him off with the ending.

“Fucking PR shit. See, that's how the fucking liberal cunts start going on about me being racist. I don't care about the colour of the skin of the guy I lose to. Give me Jackson Midnight, or Lance Washington and they can call it on the fly and I'll take a dive for them any day – 'cos they fucking know what they're doing. But Stevie the fucking Wondercunt??? He's not ready

to be mid-card yet and cock sucking bloody cunt puke of an asshole Jeff fucking Gilliard puts him in the main event, because he ran out of other black guys.”

I just shrugged my shoulders... I really had no opinion on racism. I always just cared about the guy, not his background... religious, racial, national, sexual... as long as the person was OK, or OK to work with, everything else was of no importance to me.

“So, what’d you want here anyway, little man?”

“You called me last night, to meet with you.”

“You’re the new booker, who’s gonna make the next face of the company?” he looked at me laughing.

“Well, the guy’s name is Fist and he has to go over as a commando within less than a year. I was hoping you could help there too.”

“The Vietnam Veteran? I’m not into that. War and wrestling can be really tricky.”

“Well, I gotta run it by Max and Ducky first, as it’s their personal request that I succeed with the guy...”

That got his attention. He’d have a chance to be with them for quite a while.

“But the idea was, to have him as an arrogant face, squashing jobbers. Then he run into a mid-carder and loses. He’d blow his top and become a heel, squashing jobbers again. Then there’s got to be a huge battle royal, where he wins.”

“What does it do for me? I’m not even in the story.”

“At the night of the battle royal, you should be fighting a big single’s match, when you’re getting jumped by a foreign tag team, someone like the Belarus Brothers. This would be pushing you from heel into face, a turn we’d build up before. As those are foreign guys attacking an American, Fist would feel the national pride – being a veteran and all, and would come to help you. So, you’re both patriotic and fight the heels together, forming a tag team, to face the guys at the next big show. If they’re the tag champions at the time, even better. We can make it the next POT and the two of you bring the belts back home to the US of A. But as you are both single fighters, you vacate the tag titles, there’s a tag tournament, and you each resume your individual face careers. He goes for the All American belt, also held by a non-American and you’re the number one contender for the heavyweight belt.”

Terence looked at me: “And I’d have to carry the team, because the guy’s green, right? How did you ever talk me into this?”

I knew I didn’t, but I wasn’t about to tell him that. He wanted in, to get on Max’s and Ducky’s good side. Locker room policy... yes, wrestling is full of it. No wonder though. It’s not a sport of competition, but a sport of pushes and decisions of the creative team. I sort of knew this, but didn’t realize what’s it like in the big leagues... still, being on the good side of Brogan never was a bad idea. I just didn’t want to go against Brady or Mitch as I had genuine respect for them.

“I’ve got my last match tonight, before POT 4, kid, but I suggest we meet at Max’s office Tuesday, after lunch... I’ll set up the meeting. I mean, everybody, who’s anybody will want a foot in the door for the next year’s program, so we should be among first ones. You just stick with me kid... but don’t drag this veteran along. You’ll fill him in afterwards.”

Having a power player like Brogan is a double-bladed sword, but without such pushes, you can’t make it. Sure, I accepted. Also, this gave me some time to catch up with my friends. I’ll go and see Smooth at the show... don’t know where he’s performing, but I’ll just get the info

from the main office. And I'll have to find Smack... and Spike. Hope they're home. I still haven't told them how sorry I am for what happened to Titus.

Bass, fired, who knows where I could find him. But it would be good to find him, I could use him... we'll need a jobber whom Fist can smash, so they can start and practice together. I guess he'll be happy to get paid to be in the ring again, after the botch.

Chapter V: Press, pressure, persuasion

* *Friendship?*

How many toes I must have stepped on... but I was a hotshot in an angle with Ducky, put among Lab rats by Max and was even one of the promising talents... Mitch and Brady were powerful enough to stop me, but in a way, they felt I was doing right so they didn't want to stop me. I've earned some of their respect and trust... being my old man's son probably helped as well. Brogan could probably try to shoot me down, too. So a programme with him was a good more, his career was getting a boost and he was fine with it. And the old guys like Humongous or O'Toole were constantly against everything, but kept quiet as long as they didn't have to do jobs and were still on the card drawing money.

One thing some guys resented me for, I found out later, was the Titus retirement. He was unable to continue working after Dick broke him... but the guys who held a grudge against me, were also the guys who were already afraid of me. They thought I set up the whole thing to break Titus. I didn't and Butch, who was the only ring veteran that was really involved with me at that time, stood by my side.

This weekend, was very important to me, as for the first time, I had to face people I was in charge of. I would have faced them, did I not skip the debriefing at Max's office the morning after the show. So where to find the guys on Saturday morning?

I checked with the main office to find out where Smooth would be wrestling this weekend and to check up on Spike, if he's back with the show. He wasn't. Just hasn't shown up or replied ever since they took Titus and Smack to the hospital somewhere in the suburbs... So I'll go see Smooth, who was in one of those small towns back in C shows, with a live crowd of five hundred max, at some local school gym.

I'd had to get to Manhattan to grab a bus, but I could make it by lunchtime... perfect time to interrupt a friend and offer him a hot meal in exchange for some friendly talk and information... at least I hope it will be friendly... so, I called a cab.

I really prefer getting a car and driving, but getting a rental isn't always easy, especially with fake ID... getting my own car or a van even, now that would be a different story and probably would make sense now. After all, I can do whatever I want with the budget. That was one of the things I was thinking over while on the bus, and finally, I arrived to Parsippany, asking about the gym at the station – and it was really close by.

They were setting up the ring for tonight, and I saw Bass among the guys helping out. I called out to him: “Bass, you're back at setting up rings?”

He must have recognised my voice, but he never turned around, so I walked up closer.

“Were you suspended for the botch?”

“What's it to you? You ran out on us.”

He's bitter, can't blame him. Bass, without the family, always felt that the people who could be trusted are the ones who don't run out on each other.

“Bass, am I here now? I've come to set things straight.”

“Hold this,” he said to the guy and pushed the clamps for the ring ropes in his hands.

“How will you set anything straight, kid? We had a match, Dick broke Smack’s dad, she lost a baby, hates her father and Dick. Her old man hates her, and Dick and you... Spike just wants to take care of both of them – the father and sister, and he’s got his hands full... And they suspended me for hurting a guy who should be on the main stage. I can only thank Butch that I can still work with the crew to earn my living, until they maybe decide to take me back. And you are nowhere to be found, don’t come to see us, aren’t there when we get called to the office when we get chewed up to share the heat, and now you show up to set things straight? How?!?!?!?”

“Relax. Did I ever lie to you? I’ll set it straight and I’ll start with you. We got a new guy, who needs to be in squash matches, winning. You’ll be the guy he’ll be working with. First, we got to school him, so you work with him for three months, getting 200 a week. Then both of you hit the house shows and you’ll get 150 for a show, three to four shows a week. All together you’ll be making almost 10 grand in half a year. All honest, all legit and for the first three months you won’t be on the road.”

He started doing some math in his head... “That’s what a janitor makes in a year.”

I knew I got him: “So don’t tell me, I ran out on you guys! I had to go to the main office. There was some big shit happening that night and I had to clean it up. These things take time. But I came for you. I came to find you, right?”

“How did you find me, anyway? Nobody, not even Butch, knows where I am.”

“I figured you’d stick around... Spike and Smack ain’t on the road, so I figured you’d be where Smooth is, and he’s wrestling here tonight.”

Most people would figure out, I was looking for Smooth only, but Bass bought the story and there was something like respect in his eyes, extending his hand: “Thank you. I accept.”

Did I just promise him 9.6k out of my 30k budget for the next half a year? It really isn’t as much as it sounds. Steve was right. But what was I to do? This is big money for Bass and he would deserve it. I still keep more than half to spend and keep my pay on the side.

“Schoolyard is over there, guys. You gonna help, grab something and help, you gonna talk, both of you get lost, but there’s no pay in it. The ring has to be set for tonight!”

“That’s my boss, gotta run.”

“One more thing? Where’s Smooth?”

Bass was turning away, trying to catch up on work: “Try the all you can eat buffet!” He yelled, as he started working on the ring again.

3 bucks, and you could stay there for three hours, with food and drinks as much as you want, and no tips to the waitress. This was a great place for a bunch of hungry wrestlers. Sure enough, I found five of them at a table – the guys who shared the car to get here.

Smooth wasn’t too happy to see me during lunch. Talking would mean less eating and his three hours of food would be running out. I sat down and said, you’re in no hurry guys. Next round’s on me.

Smooth sat down at my table: “Where were you man! That was a wild night. What happened to you, you just went missing.”

“I was called to the office... there was much shit to clean up.”

“Tell me about it. Titus needs surgery in several places, Smack lost a baby and is on happy pills not to cut her wrist, Spike is running from one wing of the hospital to the other with a black eye, because he was in a fight with Dick – who really is a dick – over Smack’s baby she

was carrying and lost, but each day in the hospital costs a diamond... Titus is in, insurance covers it, but Spike took Smack home the second day... and poor Bass got fired. Luckily, Butch stood up for him and he's part of the road team setting up the place. Good thing we've got a truck with our own ring and equipment. If we were renting it, he'd be fired all together. And then you're gone and don't even answer the phone anymore!"

"Sorry, man, I got caught up in a really crazy ride and Bass will be taken care off, sooner or later I'll call you up as well, there's some money to be made. I've become a lab rat."

There was no point telling Bass that, as he wouldn't know what to do with the info, but Smooth had family in the business and he could appreciate the news.

"You're working on an angle for somebody? I mean, that's what you guys do, right? Work on high profile angles for new talent, to make big bucks."

"You've got it. You've never heard of him. He's not a wrestler and maybe he never will be, but he'll have a run worth millions."

So we started chewing the fat... not only what was on plates... but I was careful not to tell too much. The Fist thing was too hot to reveal, and Brogan being involved is something nobody should find out... I was just thinking how Smooth could be the job guy for Goldbricks after the first squash matches. One he could do more moves, so it wouldn't just be Bass working with him. But what I really wanted to hear was more about Smack... unfortunately, he didn't know.

The happy pills was the last he heard of the thing and he didn't talk to Spike once he got on the road. Spike's probably taking care of Smack and visiting Titus while he's waiting for the surgery. I'll try visiting them tomorrow, I still know where they live.

After all the eating the guys went to the gym to get ready for the show tonight, while I went walking around... thinking about Smack... feeling a strange tension in my pants. I guess it's not broken, it's getting hard and I had to adjust my zipper and the surrounding area. It still hurt, but what did Barney say – if it gets hard and stands up, it's nothing to worry about.

But what was it about Smack, except for her lips, legs, boobs... never mind... she's hot and I'm totally daydreaming about her.

I didn't plan to see the show, so I just went to find Bass, invite him for a beer and go back home. He asked, if he could come with me and crash at my place... why not, there was a couch in the kitchen and a bed in the room, so we could both sleep there... and I kinda had a feeling he wanted to stay with me for a longer period, to make sure, I'll keep my part of the deal about his money.

Didn't bother me one bit, at least not straight away. He'd be in the garage most of the time, working with Fist, and I'll be doing things like – going to the library, to find out about the war veterans of Vietnam – so having a roommate wouldn't be all that bad, especially not a bulky guy you wouldn't wanna mess with. Kindda made me feel safe on the way from the station to the dump I was living in at the moment.

Next morning, being Sunday and all, Bass asked me, where the nearest church was. I was surprised, as I never figured him to be a church going guy... but then again, me not belonging to any church, I never figured anybody to be a church going guy.

He said: "Well, the church's my family. It's not so much about god and all, as I can say my prayers anywhere. It's about the people at the church. Every town you go to, you know there's a community thinking the way you do, supporting the teachings we all share... It gives you the sense of belonging."

I could understand, how a guy without a family, would feel a genuine need for that kind of bonding with other people, it actually made sense to me.

“I’ll find the church. Just promise me, you’ll wait for me, so we go visit Spike and Smack together, OK?”

While I was waiting for him, I called dad, to tell him about things.

“Hi kid! You doing OK?”

“Fine dad. Just wanted to talk to you. Thanks for meeting me the other day.”

“Sure. How did it go at the briefing with Max?”

“I was all cool. I got promoted to be a lab rat. Like you are.”

“I know Steve called me. Told me to teach you about us Vietnam veterans, but I ain’t got time until after POT. You’re OK kid?”

“Sure, just calling to let you know.”

“All right, thanks. I’m in a hurry, but nice to hear you. Can we meet on Tuesday? I’ll be back in town.”

“Great, I’d love that. But I have a meeting in Max’s office... so maybe in the evening?”

Dad laughed: “At Max’s, with Brogan? Haven’t had the call, but might happen I’ll be there too. If not, we’ll catch up in the evening. See you Tuesday!”

“Bye dad.”

Who knows where the office wired me, when I called to talk to dad. He’s on the road somewhere, I’m sure they had a big show last night and he was doing the colour commentary... I can probably see him more on TV than in person... but I’m part of the business too, so I can’t blame him for being away. Especially not, if he takes the time to see me, like he did this week, after the show.

He really did take good care of me. OK, maybe another father could have done better, but with what my dad had and knew, he did really well. When I was too little to leave home, he stayed with me, and when I grew up enough to tag along, he took me with him and made me who I am today. *Although, I’d prefer having a mom too. I never blamed dad, as he didn’t put any heat on her for cheating... Knowing him, they could probably work things out somehow... but she just lost her nerve and killed herself.*

Since Bass still wasn’t back, I put some potatoes to boil. We’ll need to eat and I guess while Bass is crashing with me, we’ll eat together. I’ve some fish on ice too we can deep fry. I’ve always preferred even the simplest home-made meals to the pre-prepared frozen TV diners or eating out – even though it’s easier and more delicious... it costs much more and you never know, what’s in it.

At about time the potatoes were ready, Bass showed up: “You’ve got quite a group going to this here church, you do. Some mighty fine looking people. Maybe we should go together someday, so you’d meet your neighbours.”

He was right, I knew nothing about the people living near me, nor did I care. But if I’m thinking of permanently living somewhere, I guess I should find out. But, come on, not here. I’ll do it after I move to somewhere more respectable.

“We’ve gotta take the bus to see Spike and Smack. I know where they live. Wanna eat something first?” I’ve changed the topic.

So we had fish and boiled potatoes... not a classy meal, but both felt better afterwards.

There was something so simple and honest about Bass' religion, I let it be, even when he showed me the images of Mary and Jesus on necklaces, he bought to give to Titus' family. I mean, to me, god was somebody who took my mom away from me, for him the people at the church were somebody who substituted his family. We just deal with different things in a different way.

The bus conversation wasn't much better, but at least it didn't take too long. When we got off, I got some flowers for Smack and a six-pack of beer.

I was very nervous, more than I would care to admit. Will Spike blame me for something? I really have to talk to him and explain a few things, because none of it was planned and he is one of the friends I felt I could rely on. And most of all, what will Smack do? How is she anyway? What's up with the pills? And how will I act towards Smack, especially with this big lummoX with me... I wanted to see her alone, maybe even... shit, now I'm thinking of Hill and what I'd be doing with her... or better said what she'd be doing to me. Damn, that's not the image I want in my head just before seeing Smack. Pain! Thank you, for the pain while getting an erection, that kinda brought me out of it.

We walked to the place and up the stairs, with Bass knocking on the door. We heard the chains snapping and the locks unlocking – the door opened up a bit, and a zombie resembling Spike asked Bass in a low voice, pointing a thumb on a motionless hand towards me: “Why did you bring him here for?”

“I've got fresh bagels for you guys, let us in,” Bass answered and showed a brown paper bag. When and where did he buy them, I wouldn't know.

“And these are fo...” The door slammed, when I wanted to show the flowers I got for Smack... but soon we heard an unwilling hand unlocking those chains to let us in. “She's sleeping, so let's not be too loud,” and he gestured towards the kitchen.

There were many newspaper articles cut out, about the event. Didn't even know how much publicity it meant, as I just moved on to the next thing... The local papers were full of titles like *Abusing father making sure no one calls him grandpa anytime soon*; or *Women vs wrestling – a match bound to end in a miscarriage*; and *The boyfriend makes sure, an old pervert will never touch anybody again*; but I guess the one that got to Spike most was *A young man thorn between a love for his abused sister and worry about a beat up father*.

Bass and Spike hugged, well, more or less Spike just leaned on Bass and couldn't stand anymore. He was all worn out and in a desperate need of somebody to support him, literary. Bass helped him to a chair and sat him down, I just followed them into the kitchen, feeling completely unneeded, unwanted and lost. I never realised, that newspapers would pick up a story. Neither did I realize what angles they'd take. But yes, they saw a known wrestler hit a young girl and she started bleeding. They saw a young guy beat up the wrestler for it. They knew which hospital they were taken to, and as they both checked in under their real names, one of the reporters, *actually the only reporter that was there, but worked as a freelancer for several local newspaper, selling each of them a different story, making it seem like there were hordes of newspaper guys hanging about*, realized they're family and started asking Spike about it... you know, sneaky like, sitting in the waiting room, with a wrapped up hand, pretending he's waiting and talking to people also waiting there... with Spike being the only other person in the waiting room. So, this guy, Vic Quadrusso was how he introduced himself, got everything out of thunderstruck Spike.

I put the beer on the table, still holding to the flowers, Bass telling me “Will you put down the flowers already and get this guy a big glass of water?”

Spike looked at me, when I handed him the water, and I was reading it in his eyes. It wasn't hate, it wasn't anger, it was fear and it read: “How could you have done this to us?”

Without a word Spike told me everything. With the newspaper articles and all, it just snapped in my brains, their family went to pieces. I felt dizzy and just got down on my knees in front of Spike and all I could say was: “Sorry. It wasn't supposed to go down that way.”

Now Bass picked me up by the shoulders and sat me down behind the table. He opened up three beers and looked first at me, then at Spike... “We're all friends. Nobody wanted to hurt anybody. Let's drink on that.”

I was so happy now, this lummo was with me, as his common sense took control and you could really see, he was more grown up than any of us. After we each took a sip Bass asked Spike: “Can I check on her?”

Spike nodded, while he was piercing me with a blank stare, “Just don't wake her up. She needs all the sleep she can get.”

Bass patted Spike on the shoulder and left the kitchen.

“So, you're sorry?” it was almost like a laugh coming out of Spike's mouth. “I believe you, but what good does that do any of us?”

A fair question. It wasn't that they blamed me for it... it was like an earthquake destroyed their world. So, what good would it do, if the earthquake said sorry? The damage was done and they had to deal with it. Me being there felt like salt to the wound, but I really wanted to help, just didn't know how.

“Is there anything I can do for you guys?”

Spike looked at me, this time he really looked at me, not through me like before.

“Just tell me, did you know, what will happen?”

“No. I didn't know there was heat between Smack and Titus, nor did I ever suspect Titus would want to do a shoot.”

“And what were you thinking about, when it all started? Why didn't you break the match?”

“You were there, what could I do? I didn't know Smack was pregnant. I never planned for your dad to hit her for real. The ref tried to pull them apart and break up the Nelson, but couldn't and when your dad fell and Dick snapped the knee.”

“The chicken wing, man... why didn't you stop with the knee and call out the stretcher. The knee was the worst part but you let it go on and even brought Smack back to the ring.”

“I had to. The crowd was ready to riot. I had to calm them down and bring the show to a hold.”

“Fuck you and the show! It wasn't a show. Dad got hurt for real, sis got hurt for real... and you wanted to make it a part of the show. That night, wrestling was anything but a show. My family got broken and you cashed in on it, like we were all actors in a play you wrote!”

“Spike, listen to me, I had to do it. Don't you see? Your dad hit Smack for real and the crowd was ready to hurt him. The show needed closure otherwise a riot would break out and your dad was the one who'd get hurt.”

“Like he didn't get hurt now? You arrogant prick! Don't tell me, you were thinking, for one second, about my father. You were thinking about the show, I could see it in your eyes.”

He was right. I was making stuff up now, about worrying about Titus, but it was true. I wanted the crowd to calm down and for it, the show had to satisfy. So, bringing the show to an end, was the best way to prevent a riot and also to prevent the people hurting Titus.

“But fuck that, just tell me one thing – were you in on it?”

“Hell no! I never had a clue what’s about to happen.”

“And how much money you made off of it?”

“None! We all got what was agreed beforehand and you knew the deal.”

“But with dad out of work, how will we survive? I’ll have to take care of him and Smack now. And I bet the ring’s off limits to me. Especially after the newspapers tore my family apart.”

“I can get you back in the ring. There’s no heat on you. You’d be paid well. Five grand for three months.”

“With you? You think I could ever trust you?”

“I’m telling you, I didn’t have anything to do with it. I never double-crossed anybody.”

He was staring me down, looking for something to pin on me. Not because he’d believe I was guilty, but because he needed a villain to fight, to feel better.

“You didn’t know Smack was pregnant?” Spike finally asked me.

“He didn’t,” Smack said, pushing Bass away, as he was making sure she wouldn’t fall or something, making their way towards the kitchen. “No one knew. Not even Dick. Even I didn’t know yet. I only realized, when I got this weird pain in my stomach after Mitch sat me down behind the curtain. But that ain’t gonna bother me anymore...” she gasped for air.

“Don’t sis, you’re not up to it.”

“Bro, don’t interrupt. I wanna get it off my chest.”

So, she started telling everything from her side of the story...

***** Let’s twist it up again***

“You all know,” Smack started, “me and Big Dick were lovers. I liked it a lot. He was full of energy, passion and harder than a smooth steel rod. We were hitting it off every chance we had and were both hooked on it. But apart from sex, we weren’t an item.”

Bass was visible getting uncomfortable and I was bulging too. I swear, at one point I think even Spike got uneasy, although being her brother and all, it was probably for a different reason.

“I don’t want to end up like one of the ring rats, just riding high on the waves of steroids and coke... but it felt so good, I got lost in it. I stopped taking care of me, so there was no pills, no rubber, no nothing and he got me pregnant and probably filled me up with diseases I couldn’t pronounce.

And I didn’t know or care about any of it, as long as he gave me my multiples. It was bliss and it was all I cared about. Until I caught him with two other girls. He said he was bored with me alone, so he brought them to spice up the act. He was real anal about it, but I went along with it, even though I didn’t like it... So, I told him, I want to be exclusive or nothing at all. He wanted to believe it was a bluff and wanted to call me on it, but I wasn’t bluffing. We had a fallout, and he got rid of the other two girls in the morning. They were paid by the hour... or cumshot, depending what was easier. Also, he promised me to start a real deal of a relationship, starting by taking me out to dinner. I was game. After all, what could I lose?

There he told me, about his three illegitimate children, with four women... don't ask, two were lesbians who were messing around with him just so they wouldn't need artificial insemination.

It was at that point, that I realized, this guy's no good for me.

He was saying how he is looking for somebody to calm down with and start a real family. He said he felt, I could be the one. Finally, he's got enough money on the side.

It was bullshit. He just wanted more of my pussy, because I could keep up with him and pound him harder than any of the two whores he brought in the night before. I'm sure I was his first power pussy. I was able to ride him or tighten up so he was unable to pull his cock out. Stuff like that made him hornier for me than I ever was for him. But he was nothing more than a dick – his only asset and his only character trade.”

“Hold up, did you guys hear that?” Spike said. Me and Bass being completely in a fantasy porn world of our own.

“It came from the fire escape.”

“You should go check,” I told Bass, who got up and followed Spike to the other room.

I thought, now's my chance to get a moment alone with Smack... don't know what I wanted with it, but I wanted it. As soon as both guys left, I started to ask a question: “Tell me, how...” but was interrupted by yelling from the window: “HEY YOU! STOP! Bass, run down the stairs, I'm going down the fire escape. Let's grab the bastard! Kid, go with Bass! Sis, lock up!”

There was a man listening in on us, and Spike wanted to catch him, so he almost jumped from the fourth floor to the sidewalk below, to get a hold of him!

Me and Bass ran down the stairs, I just heard the door locking behind us. Bass was jumping down four stairs at the time well ahead of me so I could barely hear him say: “Quite tall, skinny looking guy in jeans and grey T-shirt. Has glasses and short black hair.”

So, does everybody else, I thought, how am I to recognise him...

Bass turned right once he got to the street and I followed, to hear yelling in the back alley. I could recognise Spike's voice say: “... and feed them to you raw! And I'll pull your nails out one by one, showing them in your ass! Tell me, what the fuck were you doing up there!”

When I got there, I saw Spike holding this guy pinned to the floor, yelling at him.

“Bass, get Spike off the guy before he kills him!” I yelled.

So, Bass grabbed Spike and I stepped in front of the guy on the floor, not to let him get away.

“Calm down Spike, he ain't going anywhere. Let's get him back to your place and find out, what he wanted.”

Spike was furious, but agreed, saying: “You're right, we don't want witnesses.”

I was genially scared of that statement, but went along with it.

There were already people gathering around us, so I started explaining: “He was jerking off on the fire escape, while looking at his sister. Had her panties in his hand...”

There were no police there yet, so people were nodding, some even spat at the guy. Most people around here knew Smack, she was young, good looking and lived here for a long time. And most people believed the story, with no sympathy for the peeping Tom. The started dispersing.

We put the guy under the shower, locking the bathroom from the outside, while trying to figure things out.

“That’s the reporter, that was asking me all the questions while I was waiting at the hospital. This son of a bitch was writing about us and wanted to hear more. I suggest we rough him up, to teach him a lesson.”

“Spike, calm down,” I said. “If we kill him, we got trouble, big time. If we don’t we must make sure, he doesn’t come back with cops and lawyers. You leave the talking to me, OK?”

“Here you go again, kid, taking control and making things right. You little puke started this whole mess!”

Smack put her hand on Spike’s shoulder: “Listen to him, bro. It wasn’t his fault, as I was saying, and he can get us out of more trouble... you’ll just make it worse for all of us.”

“What happened to you sis? You’d cut his hand off and break his ribs with it... now, you’re just all forgive and forget. Those pills are making your head crazy.”

“Bro, you’re an idiot and you’ll never be anything but a jobber!”

I wanted to tell you this, but this creep interrupted us. With all that’s happened to me, I realized I just want to make it big in the business. I trust pipsqueak over here,” she looked at me, “I want to make it to the big leagues – the Women’s belt! I don’t care how hard I gotta work, I’ll make it to the top and get rich! You’ll help me Timmy, you’ve got it in you. Make the hassle, make people talk about me, put me under the spotlight and I’ll shine brighter than anything you’ve ever seen! And I’ll get rich doing it. It’s all about bucks anyway.

Use this motherfucker, the press can help. Just make sure, it’s a story I can live with. He pulled us through dirt, he can clean the mud off our name. You know I can take bumps and you know I understand angles, so whatever it takes, it’s fine by me.”

It was settled then, I’ll handle the guy. With Bass as my enforcer, it shouldn’t be hard, but it has to be done away from both Spike as he wouldn’t know how to bluff. Not sure how well I’ll do, but I’m willing to try. Just have to tell Bass to keep quiet all the time.

“Sure, I’ll help you, if you wanna. But you need your rest now Jenny. Who knows what those pills are doing to you.”

“Screw you peep-squeak. I’m not taking the pills. They gave the pills to me, but the minute I was out of the hospital and nobody could force me to take them, I flushed them down the toilet. I don’t want this shit to mess with my head. I was just doing some very hard thinking. I knew how to pull my dad’s buttons, so I pushed them to get all the commotion in the ring. Those guys that were writing the script don’t know shit. They wanted me to play a little whore. I know they wanted a slut chant. But I ain’t having it, I can turn slut anytime, but for now, it’s my looks and skills that’ll get me over. You understood, pipsqueak, I thought you were on my side and then you come off patronising me with this Jenny shit and all. I’ll knock your teeth out. I don’t need a shoulder to cry on. I would dump Dick anyway, and I’d get my own way away from dad too. And I counted, I still do, on you helping me. You can hump your milfs all you want, I ain’t after your dick, but I want you as my manager, because you get it and you react the way it’s good for the business and you’re on the inside circle making your way to the top. The best thing you did for me was, to have Grace Powers pin a known wrestler and that’s my claim to future fame.”

She sounded like cutting a god damn promo. But I knew she was covering something. I just felt it.

“I don’t know what happens next, but you got here without me calling, so I guess you’re legit. Get this press guy sorted out and put me under the spotlight, I wanna be fighting in the

ring as a mid-carder on the way to the top! And there ain't nothing stopping me. Not you, bro, not my dad, not Dick, not even that god damn baby that I lost and will never have a chance to get again... not even mom could stop me... not even a kid calling me mom, because there won't be any... I'll be the biggest star there is and the whole world will worship me and I'll be happy about it, and..." She broke in tears, leaning to my shoulder, "...and you'll help me. Help me, Timmy!"

"I promise, hot stuff, I'll help."

Spike was looking at me like a wild animal, going on nothing but instincts: "Just make sure, she's not hurt again."

She looked at me, hugged me and whispered in my ear: "I trust you, I'll do whatever you want, just push me to the top and don't ever stab me in the back. Not you, Timmy, not you."

"OK, Jenny, now let Spike take you to get some shut eye. Me and Bass got work to do with the reporter."

I got up, turned toward Spike: "Make sure Smack'll be all right. I promise you, we're a team and we'll get through this together... And give my regards to your father. I really had nothing to do with all that and want him to get well soon."

Then I told Bass, "Why are you still sitting? We gotta get the guy from the bathroom. I'll do all the talking, you just keep quiet and make sure he listens to what I have to say!" That seemed like a tough line to say, so the guy would understand I got an enforcer and he better toe the line.

**** Fresh off the press*

I was determined now, to make use of this. With Smack's blessing, I've got all the cards I need to play out my winning hand... Just gotta make this Vic guy see reason and we'll be shooting for the stars – in due time. Fist wasn't ready to enter the ring yet... but with Bass being in the gym with him, under my instructions, we'll get there. We'll get there!

I unlocked the bathroom door. I was afraid Vic'd start making a scene once we're outside the apartment, so I asked him: "How's the shoulder doing?"

He was still in pain, but realized I wasn't out to hurt him some more. He just snarled a bit.

"Let's go for a walk. My friend," I pointed with my thumb at Bass, "and I have something we'd like to talk to you about. You know, you shouldn't be sneaking around, peeping on chicks in neighbourhoods like this. People would want to hurt a perv like you, jerking off at their favourite little wrestler girl, you know?"

He got the message, the back story was, he's a perv and that he'd better go with us. He came quietly.

"We'll be in touch!" I've said to Spike on the way out.

As soon as we were on the stairs, I turned around to face Vic – with Bass standing two stairs higher, almost hovering over us.

"So, you're from the press, aren't you? That was a dumb thing to do, to sneak around like that. Spike's not kind on people spying on his family, especially now, after all the newspapers started slandering his family."

"You're the one to talk, Sawyer! You orchestrated the whole thing! You want your gorilla to break me like that Dick broke Nik? I ain't scared bro. By gawd, I'll get rich off suing you guys."

“So, you know me. I’m flattered. But if you wanna make money, we gotta talk.”

He looked me up and down and said: “Just the two of us. I don’t want your vanilla gorilla around. You want to talk, we’ll talk, but not with a guy ready to snap my neck like a twig.”

I figured I got his interest, so he won’t try anything stupid. And it would be better to talk more freely, without Bass listening in.

“Fair enough. Bass, will you find your way to my place? Here’s the key, wait for me there. I’ve got things to talk about with this guy.”

Bass took the keys: “You sure you’ll be OK kid? I’d love to kick this guy’s ribs in for writing about Smack and Spike.”

“Sounds like a great idea, but maybe I’ve got a better one Bass, trust me. Just don’t lock me out, OK?”

When Bass left, Vic said: “And if I go straight to the police now?”

“And what will you say, there’s four of us claiming that you were invading our privacy. You’ve trespassed and we caught you believing you were a burglar, turned out you might have been a peeping Tom, so maybe you stole some of Smack’s thongs... nah, you’ll never be able to explain what you were doing on the fire-escape listening in on us.”

“You’re too young to read people that well Sawyer, what’s your secret?”

Felt nice that somebody called me by the last name. Not Kid and not even Timmy. Sounded like there’s some respect involved, “I guess I’m just smart beyond my age.” Damn, that sounded lame, but he laughed anyway.

“OK, so let’s go grab a burger or something and let’s talk.”

“Deal, but there’s a catch, you don’t publish an of this, unless we both agree on it.”

“That’s called, let’s talk off the record.”

“Never mind. Vic, I’ve a plan and you’ll help me. But for that, we need to agree on few things. It’s not about on or off the record... it’s business, pure and simple.”

Now he raised an eyebrow, scratched his shaggy beard and said: “This I’ve gotta hear, bro.”

We went to this little joint, with half decent chicken salads, as it turned out, and started talking, me putting a few aces on the table right away.

“It’s like this. As you know, I was booking small shows, but just got involved with a bigger programme. This involves the next big superstar of the industry.”

“Big deal, Max is bringing in talent from another territory all the time. Who’s it this time? Python Pete, probably, or maybe Eric the Cornbeard.”

“Don’t know about those deals, but this guy hasn’t wrestled yet and he will be launched into the orbit. They’ve got the merch ready for him and a run for the belt.”

“The old guys won’t have it. The belt won’t be dropped if it’s not to a legit guy with an amateur background or something similar. You’re talking shit, Sawyer.”

“Hold your dicklicker.”

He pulled up, like the insult really had the effect, and said: “You’re on the level? LLW’s really planning to run a programme with a guy who’s never set foot in the ring?”

“Not only that, I’m in charge of making it happen.”

“Rough bro, that’s a career suicide. Didn’t your dad try and talk you out of it?”

A thought started appearing in my mind at that time, about how everybody realized this job was almost impossible, that’s why nobody experienced wanted to touch it, but Steve’s all in for it, and Ducky too, so they’ll be pushing for it and by now I realized that Max is not in full control

of his promotion, after all, this will be covered off of Ducky's account. But I also realized that this should be kept a secret. Not that Quadrusso was anything like a real investigative journalist, but he knew some ins and outs of the business, well enough to know who I was and I wasn't a somebody. I ignored his remark.

"And I'll utilise the media. As you're already getting involved, I want to talk to you first. If you won't take it, I'll talk to other guys, who covered the Titus vs. Longley shoot fight.

Now he started laughing: "There aren't any. I wrote different angles for different papers. This ain't that big of a story, bro, to get so many reporters interested, but if each paper is ready to pay me, I'm willing to write them a story."

Honestly, this really is a guy I want to work with. One reporter, several newspapers and several angles to the story: "Perfect!" Damn, I got overexcited. But hey, I decided to pull him in, so I got to give him something.

"That's just the kind of reporting I'd want and need for Goldbrick."

"Who's he?"

"Told you, he hasn't wrestled yet. Anyway, there's this character – Goldbrick, and we'll have him run in like a face."

"Idiots, you can't have an unknown and unexperienced face. How can he be over, if people never saw him? This will never work!"

"Exactly, that why we want a face that the people hate, so they'd be pushing his buttons forcing a heel turn, so that after half a year he will be over and we turn him face again."

"That hasn't been done. You're really sticking your neck out. How do I fit in?"

"You'll write exclusives about him, making the public opinion against this new good-looking face, and explaining the made-up demons of the past, once he turns heel, so that people will understand his character. It's gonna be a bumpy ride and promos and vignettes alone won't be able to cover the whole story."

"What's in it for me?"

"You'll get all the materials and stories, you just take pictures and run articles in the papers you've been writing to until now."

"That ain't good enough. I can't pay rent with that."

"Won't the papers pay you for articles?"

"For an unknown guy you're showing down everybody's throat? You're kidding, bro! I want hundred bucks for each article."

Math time! I've learned from my promise to Bass, how fast my budget can run out, so I've did some quick thinking: 100 per article, at least ten newspapers, two articles per month for a nine month period...

"No dice, I can give you 500 bucks a month and you write the articles according to my guidelines."

"I'll have to hire a photographer, so I need double the amount. Also, how many articles, how many newspapers?"

"Ten papers, twice a month and I'm not doubling it. 650 a month for you and photographer."

"850 and the photo guy gets all the rights to pictures to re-sell to other media."

"750 and even if the photographer sells the pictures, LLW has the rights to use all his material for free in the future. Also, I don't deduct your pay when the newspapers start paying you for covering Goldbrick."

“OK, but you’re sending me finished articles not just guidelines and LLW won’t use the photos earlier than half a year after they’ve been made. We want first half year to be exclusive.”

“Deal!”

We shook hands on it and I felt proud at that point, because I’d still have over 13k in my budget and I’ve already got the press and jobber arranged. *Off course, were I not so green at the time, I could even press Centy – as we got to call him – to pay me money to write the stories about Fist... but hey, I was learning and the speed with which it was all happening was way too much for a guy to understand – but I had youth on my side... and also my friends.*

“Now tell me more about this Goldbrick!”

“OK, but this is not to be published. He won’t be ready for three more months, but he’ll be an ex Vietnam veteran, who’s returned a bit shell-shocked, so he comes in as this clean cut self-made goody two shoe nerdy jock, that everybody hates. And he doesn’t get it, why everybody hates him, while he’s squashing jobbers. He wants respect, but doesn’t get it. Finally, he’s in a big event, and loses. When he’s laughed off, he snaps and makes a heel turn, revealing his commando persona, destroying everybody in his path.”

He was looking at me: “That could actually work!”

“Thanks, Vic. By the way, we’ll sign a contract this week about everything we said. How can I reach you?”

He wrote down his number and address: “I’m home every day after five. Come ‘round my place and we’ll get something more decent to eat. My treat this time.”

Once more I was lucky the guy was still so impressed with everything, he agreed to sign the deal, as otherwise, it could all backfire on me, without me having a way out. If it stayed at the handshake, I’d have to stuck to the deal, but this meant I got a way out and the legal department will draft up a real deal.

**** *Something nice to come home to*

Those days were like weeks, if not months. At least that’s what I felt in my head, with all the action going on. And this particular Sunday was not over yet.

As soon as I got home, I heard women singing from my place. I knocked on my own door, where I knew Bass was waiting for me, because I told him so. I just never told him to wait alone, so he didn’t.

“Oh, look ladies, here’s my friend – Tim! He’s the smartest guy I’ve ever run across.”

He was sitting on the couch with two nice young similar looking girls on each knee.

“Hi Tim. Hope you don’t mind, these are Sarah and Clara. I met them at church today and when they saw me getting off the bus, they wanted to see where I was staying, so I invited them in.”

“Yes, Tim. We wanted to see where this nice young gentleman lives, whom we haven’t seen in our church before...” Sarah started, with Clara concluding the thought, “...and when he said, he’s new and staying with a friend, we wanted to meet you both.”

I’ll have to tease Bass about his Christian morals at some point, because his childish religious believes shouldn’t allow for something like this to happen. But for now, I enjoyed a good, creamy, creampie release in Clara? Or was it Sarah? No, Sarah is the older one and Clara is the

one with a pimple on the inside of the butt cheeks. Never mind... After getting aroused at the site and thought of Smack, my balls were getting blue, so a slow, deep dive into a pool of warm young feminine juice, was just what I wanted. Damn, Hill had me screwed up, believing good old no nonsense no fetish plain old sex would be boring. After this I can finally say, I didn't feel like a virgin anymore. It's one thing, if a slut twice your age twists, turns, dominates and forces every little drop of cum out of you... and it's a perfectly different feeling to have a wanting young girl melt under your touch, letting you slip in her so you both get lost together in waves of pleasure.

When she was on her back and me between her tights we even kissed passionately and really loved it and the sisters switched after a while... no wonder I'm not sure which one I jizzed in. Never mind, it was really nice and they ended up sleeping on my bed, with me on the couch, with Bass on the floor.

"They're not only church mice, they're ring rats too." Bass told me. "I noticed them in the crowd once or twice while working as a tag with Butch. They were always near the ring and blowing us kisses."

Bass kept on surprising me, so I decided not to open the religious discussion yet, I just told him: "Thanks for waiting up for me and sharing."

In the morning, when I got up, the girls were still sleeping nude in my bed, Bass in the middle of them both. I knew he wouldn't stay on the floor all night.

I decided not to bring him down to train with Goldbrick yet, I wanted to discuss everything with Barney and dad first, to see what they thought about it, especially getting Brogan involved.

So, on my way to the gym, I was thinking where dad could be. He said he wouldn't be in town yet, so I'll just have to call him again.

"Dad? Oh good. I thought I won't be able to reach you. Got a minute?"

"What happened? We're waiting for Tex Slinger to start the promo... I guess I've got some more time."

"I got the whole story ready for this thing to happen, but it will include the tag titles, and the All American title. How can I pull it off?"

"When did you say you and Brogan meet with Max?"

"Tomorrow, afternoon."

"I'll be there. If Max Oks the story, you can switch any titles. But why Brogan?"

"I need a hot heel involved."

"He won't do a job. He'll sooner burry you."

"I know, he's not taking a fall for Fist. They'll take the tag titles together, both becoming faces."

"Smart. Brogan's been wanting a face turn, so you make this Fist a heel, but they both turn together. Looking forward to hear the whole story. Gotta run now."

It felt reassuring dad will be at the meeting, and that he believes my idea could work. I'll start believing in my own talent after all. Now let's see, if Fist is in ring practicing, or still learning how to listen in the ring.

I found them in the separate ring, meaning Fist is training. Barney was just showing him the different ways to come out of a break up.

"How are you guys doing?"

Barney looked at me: “We’re fine. Doing the basics. You know, he really should be doing this with the job guy he’ll be squashing.”

“He’ll be around this week.”

“And the girl you promised?” Fist asked.

“It might take a while, but she’s in for it.”

“Does she look the part?”

“You bet! And she can wrestle too!”

Fist looked at me, with a hurt expression on his face: “Oh rub it in, why don’t you. I’m learning.”

“Don’t be such a prima donna, goldbrick. If she trained, she knows how to wrestle. You never trained before, so you’re catching up now.” Barney quieted him down. “Let’s start practicing a few holds.”

I guess they’re getting along fine, but yes, Fist really seemed like a prima donna. So touchy, and full of himself, thinking everything in the ring revolves around him. I bet once we shoot him into the orbit, he’s coming down hard. We’ll be able to put him over, but I don’t think anybody will want him up at the top, if he doesn’t change his attitude.

With not much to do today, seeing how the things at the gym were going fine, I thought I’d try to make more sense of what Steve told me the other day.

The real reason for our business was to see how people reacted. That’s what we are testing in those arenas, when we are provoking the crowds to react this way or another. So if we are pushing a Vietnam veteran character to be liked with the people, are we really just trying to sell soldier toys, or are we trying to have people in general change their mind about the veterans.

I went to a place, which didn’t use to be typical for me, but lately I really found useful – the library. And while I was reading some articles about the war and veterans in Vietnam, this homeless guy, who was obviously spending a lot of time in the library, came up to me and said:

“Why are you reading this shit? These news articles are nothing but propaganda. All of the newspapers have agendas and they’ll twist any truth to fit their story. It’s been like this forever. Even Garry Cooper exposed it in *The Fountainhead*.”

I was a western flick fan, before my dad started being active in wrestling again, so I knew who Garry Cooper was, but was completely clueless about *The Fountainhead*, so I’ve asked him: “What’s *The Fountainhead*?”

“It’s a film, shot in the good old days, in black and white. A great film about the human nature and character. You should watch it kid.”

Well, I was in the library and as I know that many films were made based on books, I got this crazy idea, to try and find the book *The Fountainhead*. I decided to take it home with me, but I already started reading parts of it. It was all about this guy that the media was trying to put out of business... didn’t catch on why... but instead of getting pissed off and fighting them, he just ignores their lives and goes on with dignity. Now that’s what I like!

Also, it fit with us lab rats... shaping the popular opinion of the masses, like those newspapers were in the novel. It was lies, but told in a plausible way, to make people believe them. That was opinion making. A propaganda machine. Just what I thought I’d have Vic do to get Fist over in the media. That’s what the lab does, that’s why Ducky wants us in the

background of wrestling shows. We're opinion makers! This made me feel like I'm on top of the world!

I was a typical guy with little knowledge and experience, resulting in way more confidence than I should have. That's called the Dunning-Kruger Effect now.

And this was too heavy of a thought, to keep holding on to. So, I went home, with the book to read at some other time.

Bass was alone: "Hi! Any news?"

"Yes, you should go train with this new guy. They were waiting for you already, but I want to check in with the office first. Have a meeting for tomorrow. Where's the girls?"

"Oh, they went home and I don't think they'll be coming back. It's a sin to indulge pre-marital sex."

"So, what was last night?"

"Collecting trophies!"

Sounded just about right. Anyway, I'll be moving out of the neighbourhood soon and all of this will be in the past. For now, I really felt like getting some food and some shut eye in my own bed.

Chapter VI: Schizophrenia time

** A ride into the unknown*

I got to Max's office just ten minutes earlier than I was supposed to be there, and that was considered late. Still, I had a lucky break as I just sat down in the armchair of the reception with one of his eye-candy secretary sitting behind the desk, wanting to pretend to call Max and chew me out for not being here earlier... when the elevator door opened and out came Max, Ducky, Terence and dad, patting each other on the back, laughing and smoking thick Jamaican cigars. *Maybe they were Cuban, but as that would be illegal, they kept saying Jamaican.*

"You're here kid, good!" Brogan started, "I was just telling your dad how we can set this whole thing up. Ducky also loves it and I'm telling you brother, it's the best idea I've ever had."

I knew better than to protest, but I felt hurt how he'd steal my idea right away. But in a way, he was giving me heads up, how to play along in the meeting so there'd be no trouble.

"Stacy, get us drinks and hold all my calls. We've got things to discuss. Gentlemen, will you please all come to my office?" Max invited us.

"Can you tell us about our next big superstar, kid, how's he doing?"

I looked at everybody, happy dad was there, and started talking slowly: "Well, Johnson is in his early stage of learning. He's too tense, but Barney and I had some talks with him and explained to him how the basics, how you got to work together with your opponent, trying to protect each other.

Anyway, Johnson has the looks, we can develop his character to have charisma, but in the ring, he's nowhere near a wrestler.

Since we should get him on house shows in three months, there's no time he'll be a good worker by then, that's why it's best we start him off in squash matches and just train him to squash people without hurting them. Next we'll work on him taking a few bumps."

Ducky looked at Max: "What does that all mean?"

"It means," dad replied, "this guy's a total rookie and has to be broken into the business one step at the time, if we want to start his program in front of the public in such a short time. It would take at least two years for him to get ready for the ring, and even then not at a superstar level, but I think my kid's doing miracles, and I fully trust Barney down at the gym."

"But if the guy's so green, will you be able to pull all the things off with him?" Ducky asked.

Max replied: "Well, we might be running a month or two late. Explain, kid."

"Well, you see, a guy like that won't make it big right away. We'll build him strong, but if he can only run through other people like a hot knife through butter, he'll become boring. If he only wins and has no challenge, people will start hating him. That's why we have to bring him in as a forgettable character. As Barney at the gym called him goldbricks, I thought we'd use that as a character – Goldbrick. A clean cut guy, winning without sweating and being arrogant... but wanting people to like him. Sure, the crowds will hate him, will boo him, but it doesn't matter. We'll make him snap at some point and that's when he can turn into this Vietnam veteran character you wanted him to be."

"And here's where my idea come in," Brogan interrupted.

“The kid’s got it all good, but he’d wait for this guy to become a crowd favourite again, before we’d launch his merch. I suggest we have him in his crazy commando gimmick before Christmas and have his toys out. The kids will want to play with an evil toy too! Just look at my merch. I’m a heel, but my toys sell like crazy, because when kids play, they need a hero and a villain and the villain must look more dangerous and be scarier, so the hero really is a hero.

So, put two really dangerous moves on this guy. He’s a strong man, teach him some quick comeback moves – like the chin breaker, thumb to the throat, chinlock slam and powerbomb and make him a one man wrecking crew.”

That was his idea? I bet he want’s a cut of the merch sale. But I felt better, he wasn’t taking my credit.

“Also,” dad jumped in, “have this sexy nurse character at the ring side, to take care of the opponents, as this Fist Johnson should be putting people to hospital with his moves.”

“Yeah, but never have him cheat!” Brogan jumped in again. “That way, you leave the doors open to make him face again, and we’ll do it together. I’ll put off my face turn, Max, for the sake of this new guy, so when he’s ready, I’ll still be a heel and you have other guys beat down on me and have this guy help me. So, we both turn faces and team up, with this young chick being our manager.”

“When?” Max asked.

“Between half a year and a year,” dad said.

“Will he be ready for the big show at next POT?”

“Sure thing, brother!” Brogan said. “We’ll be a tag team at that point and babyfaces, ready for a big match at POT.”

“But we need a foreign team... probably heel tag team champions to be the one attacking Brogan and Fist coming out to help.”

“I get it. Patriotism!” Max said. “We’ll have plenty of time to build a team up. What else you had in mind?”

“Brogan should cross paths with another heel, on the way to the championship belt and the tag team is from their fraction. That’s why they attack him. Fist helps, both turn face, build a tag team and go for the belts. At POT they win the belts, but decide to vacate them and hold a tournament for new tag champs, as they are both after single belts. As a veteran Fist goes for All American – at that time a foreign heel should have it. Brogan goes for the big belt. Both are extremely over and continue their own careers.”

I could see Ducky calculating something in his head: “Get Steve here, Max, I want to ask him if that’s soon enough.”

“Stacy, get Steve from the lab here, right away!” Max said into the interphone. As he already stood up, he turned to face us all. “We’ll have both Sawyers on this. The kid with his ideas and the dad with his ring experience. Together with Barney, you’ll make this guy look great in the ring and you’ll set up things on the commentary for him. I want a hype for him!”

“I think,” I saw my chance now, “we should bring in the press in on it too.”

“Well, kid, we got our own magazine, it will be in there, can get other yellow press in on it, but the real newspapers don’t care much, only cover the results and have stories about championship matches if the garden is filled out.”

“I got a reporter, who was doing stories on Titus and his kids and was running them for different papers. He’d have anything I write for him published in different papers.”

“How do you know, he’ll write what you say?” Ducky asked.

“We shook hands to sign a contract, but basically, I’ll write and pay him to get it published with 10 different papers. So, it will be stories I make up and all complement our storyline from different angles.”

“Pay him how?” dad was worried.

“Steve told me, I’m getting my budget for this.”

Ducky nodded, still thinking about all of this: “When Steve arrives, I’d like to ask Brogan and Sawyer to leave the room. We have to talk about something. Max you can stay, and kid, you better stay and listen good, or else you’ll have your nuts ripped off and showed into your skull through your nostrils!”

What is it with everybody threatening me it the violent loss of my genitalia?

“Any questions, gentlemen?” Max was trying to conclude the meeting.

“Yes,” dad jumped in. Everybody thought, he’d be starting a fight with Ducky for threatening me, or would be chewing me out for the budget I’m already spending. Instead he turned to Brogan asking: “Just what is a chinlock slam?”

“You know, when you have a guy in a side chinlock and you start a spin... and he lands flat on the stomach and it seems you’ve snapped his neck... I’ll show you at the gym. I want to see this Goldbrick and we can practice a few things.”

“Good,” Max said, “you two go to Barney at the garage and start with trainings.”

Then dad turned towards me: “And I’ll see you for dinner, Timmy. We’ve a lot to talk about!”

They left.

“Fuck kid, what made you talk to newspapers!!!” Ducky yelled out as soon as the three of us were alone. “Did you or Steve explain to him, what we’re really doing here? Does he know about the lab? If the press finds out, we’re all screwed!”

Max just said: “I don’t know what he and Steve were talking about, but the kid’s just too green to understand. Besides, you took him on your pay check Huey, so don’t look at me.”

The interphone rang: “It’s the lab rat boss.”

“Let Steve in, Stacy and get us fresh drinks. The ice machine here doesn’t seem to work anymore.”

Steve walked in: “What have you done Timmy?”

Just from seeing Ducky’s face and who was in the room, Steve knew I took initiative and the old guys didn’t trust me.

“Answer first, ask later Steve!” Max said.

“When do we need to make people care about the veterans?” Ducky asked Steve.

“Our dead line is Spring 1990... but if we wait that long, Oliver Stone will have his film out and it will seem like we’re just joining in on the parade, only going in the opposite direction. The best timing, so that we’re early enough, and connect to another event, would be sometime before summer next year. Somewhere around that time next Rambo movie will be out, but as they’ve moved it from far east to Afghanistan, it will just be a reminder, we won’t look like copycats. But you can bet first two Rambos will be running in theatres and on TV again, so we’ll be able to get our Fist over.”

“Good, the timing is perfect – next POT is around that time!” Ducky said, still biting his lip.

Whoa, I'd have to consider all of this as well? Steve was a walking overview of the popular media and made the storylines fit in perfectly. Anyway, Ducky still pursued his inquiry about the reporter: "What about media?"

"Talking to the press, Timmy? Giving interviews, were you, over the weekend?" Steve teased. Sure, as he knew it was my actions, and heard what Ducky was worried about, he had a rough idea where the problem was.

"Nope. I visited Spike and Smack, and there was this reporter spying on them. Spike had almost thorn Vic's arm off, so I had to jump in to make peace. I think I got a good deal – Vic promised me, he'll get two stories a month for ten different papers published – stories I'd write for him. I'm signing with him tomorrow."

"So, you've met Centy?" Steve laughed. "He's a piece of work. Remember Max, the guy who wanted to become your reporter for the Japanese tour? Offered to write as four guys, so we all christened him Quadrusso?"

"That's what he said – Vic Quadrusso!" I jumped in.

Ducky looked at Max: "You know the reporter?"

"Well, barely. He seemed like a nut, but we ran a few of his articles in our magazine. He came across as four guys who were fighting about the same story."

"His real name," Steve jumped in, "is Vittorio Innocente, and as he was writing four stories for the price of one, we called him Centy, as each character would make only 25 cents on a dollar he as a writer earned."

What do you think, Max? Centy could be a really good mouth piece for the Fist story? One voice praising the dominating in-ring performer, one being compassionate about a tormented veteran, another slandering a heel wrestler and the last one just pushing him over with the crowd, making it ready for the face turn? With experienced guys like Dan at the mic for the taped shows, I think this could work."

"Kid, you've got so much dumb luck, you should be shitting horseshoes covered in four leaf clovers and rabbit feet all day long! When did you say you're meeting this reporter?" Ducky asked in a much better mood, pulling his cell phone out of the suitcase.

"Gary? Can you hear me? Urgent! When can you meet me? I'm at Miller's office." Ducky called his legal advisor. "OK, see you at the bar in 40 minutes. Have an open line to your secretary as we'll be making a contract for a reporter. She'll have to bring it in right away."

While Ducky was on the phone, Steve asked me: "So what's the story with George, our next superstar? Have you tied the loose ends together yet?"

"Well, we'll have him come in as Goldbrick, a clean cut arrogant face who's squashing opponents. Most of all Bass. He's all up for it, I'll have them meet at the gym and work together. I thought I'd be the manager, but haven't figured my face turn yet, and Smack can be the groupie. Every now and again, Spike would fight too, just so there's not always the same guy in the ring. Later, I'll have Smooth come in and beat up Goldbricks to set his heel turn and then there have to be many jobbers willing to be squashed. I'm sure Max will help me, as Brogan supports the idea too. And while he's squashing them, he'll be sending them to hospital, so there's always a nurse there. But once Brogan is jumped, Fist won't stand for injustice and both guys turn face, having the big tag match at next POT – Brogan already pitched it to Max."

"And all along, you'll be writing the stories about the Vietnam veteran, that Centy Quadrusso will be publishing for different newspapers, thus preparing the grounds for the face

turn and for people to respect the war veterans, even if they are from a war that US didn't win. I want to see every article, before it's printed! Otherwise, I'm OK with the plan.

Just tell me one thing, how will you get around the repetitive matches Fist will have?

In the territories it was easy, you could have the same match in different places and nobody caught up. Now-a-days there's more people watching wrestling on TV than live in arenas. They'll get bored with the same old shit ever show."

"I was thinking, no more calling the spots during the match. The whole match must be scripted for two reasons. A – Johnson won't be ready for a real match, so you can't leave him out there hanging. He won't be able to do anything on the fly. And B – for camera angles. We must get three signature moves that look great and make the rest seem like it's different all the time. So, he'll be getting out of bear-hugs, out of sleepers... basically, he'll take an early bump, get put into a submission and will power his way out of it, to hit his three moves. But every submission must show parts of his physique, so the commentators can talk about that. An abdominal stretch can revile a scar where he got hit by a machete, a Boston crap can show where he got a bullet in the leg, a sleeper can be hurtful because he broke his neck while escaping a prison, and always his muscles must come to shine, because they're the only thing he's got."

Max was listening and liking what he heard: "Brilliant, so the guy has a same old match, but the commentators talk about different things that are exposed, because it's a different submission every time, with the camera focusing on a body part that was hurt in war."

Max kissed me on the forehead saying: "You really are a genius kid!"

It was at that point that I put a coffin in the live shows' casket. You see, before that, TV was a way to get more people into the arenas, but from that point on, Max really just kept focusing on arenas being nothing more but places, where he taped his TV production. Also, through this I completely opened the door for Centy, who later on became one of the TV show producers, making this much crazier than it ever should be, eventually making the TV show so big, it hurt the industry.

Am I proud of it? Am I sorry for it? No, I don't give a damn about that part. I love this industry and since it was always changing, this was just the next step in the development.

"So, kid, give me the contact of this reporter and we'll fix it all up. We'll make him an offer he won't turn down and you can forget about the handshake. The only thing that still stands is, you'll be writing articles for him to publish, as you've got the overview of the story."

After another hectic day, I went home, where out of all people, Bass and dad were sitting on the stairs in front of the building entrance, drinking beers.

Dad pulled me by the sleeve of the shirt, so I sat down: "Timmy, Bass told me about the girls last night... Gotta say, this is a step up from Hill, but be careful. You don't want to become a slave to your dick for the rest of your life! You knock any of them up, there will be a child to take care off. You think about it. It's not like I'm not proud of you or happy to be your dad, but trust me, being a parent is no joke. It's a grown-up thing to do and takes a lot of time, energy and a whole different kind of smarts."

"Dad, please. I promise I'll be careful, but my head is so full right now, I can't handle another worry."

“All I’m saying, Timmy, think with your brains not your balls and protect yourself, or else you won’t be able to say – let’s put this off until tomorrow. Dippers need to be changed regularly, no matter how tired you are.”

Like I wasn’t too exhausted.

“Was it difficult for you, dad, taking care of me?”

He got up, put his hand on my shoulder, to walk inside to the table, saying: “There were times I thought I couldn’t handle it, like I was all drained of energy to go on... but seeing your little innocent smile and getting your little arms to hug me, while I was feeding you sausages you didn’t want to eat, recharged my batteries and I wouldn’t change it for anything in the world. You were the only thing worth coming home to after work. Without you, I’d have nothing to live for. I’d become a total drunken wreck, like so many of the guys have, after returning from over there... but you, you were and still are the highlight of my life. I know I wasn’t always the best dad and I know I shouldn’t take you to all the pool halls with me before I started wrestling again, but I couldn’t leave you home alone and I did want to toughen you up. Still, seeing you in Max’s office today, how sure you were of what you’re doing, that really made me proud and realize, you’ve really become a man. Don’t know if you’re so sure of what you’re doing, or so full of shit that you don’t even care – but you were a pleasure to observe. A kid in a room of grown men, seeing eye to eye, taking up responsibilities. Sorry I told you the other day, you can’t take it on your shoulders, that you’re not responsible for other people... you are doing a good job of it. Now let’s eat, I brought pizza and me and Bass were waiting for you to come!”

It all felt like a quiet family evening. I guess if you’re living in a hectic world, even the resemblance of a quiet family life seems like a good substitute and you want to grab it with both hands... either that or I’ve missed dad more than I realized. Bass was just there, like he belonged, like a brother or cousin... After diner dad and I went out to a bar, to catch up and Bass said he’d take care of the place. I didn’t ask him what exactly he meant.

There was this half decent bar near by, where we were able to sit at our own table, drinking beer and not be bothered too much by the sounds of the TV roaring in the bartender’s left ear. He didn’t mind, because it was his deaf ear anyway, ever since he was a kid, who got buried in a huge pile of snow by bigger kids. The regular guests were watching the old game, where Knicks lost to Celtics in April with 107 to 119, arguing about what went wrong.

“So, dad, will you be staying for the night?”

“Don’t worry, I’m staying at a hotel. We’re all in town for the POT meetings, so I wanted to see you. You’ve been doing OK so far, but now it’s like you’ve taken a giant leap forward and that’s beginning to worry me.

Were you a wrestler getting such a big push, I’d be concerned, but you’re doing behind the scene stuff and I’m down right petrified.

This lab business is not all about wrestling, it’s big time politics.”

I took a long sip, trying to collect my thought: “I thought so. We’re tipping the public opinions, aren’t we? Like the newspapers and the TV news are doing. But in a different way.”

“Yes, we are. We’re bringing forth issues through characters, that the public is addressing. It’s like with movies or books. We’re making stories and presenting them to crowds of people. It’s always been like this. But with the lab, it’s not to get wrestlers over to make money, it’s to get people behind an idea, through the story played out by a wrestler.”

“At least we’re both in it together. I’m part of the programme now. I’ll have to do the colour commentary to push the guy over.”

It felt really nice to have this talk. Me and dad exchanged our views on things and the lab and I got confirmation, for what I was figuring out.

I kept asking dad about Nam afterwards, so I’d be ready for the character building of Fist, but I really didn’t feel the need for it. I mean, you got to feel the crowd. Still, I decided I’ll keep going to the library and do the research after we do my face turn as a manager. I still have to think about how to put it into the storyline with Fist. I’ll think about it. Maybe Centy could start publishing an angle and we bring in Goldbrick this was to tie it all together?

I never cared about history, but through dad’s stories, especially the things he said, he heard from the officers, who knew the big picture, I realized that the last few decades of history were basically nothing but one big match, with the crowd cheering and booing our troops at different times. Sure, during WWII, after we got Peral Harboured, people were cheering our guys as faces, but with the same old story line three decades latter and with many of our boys getting killed for something we didn’t really care for that much anymore – as it was showed down our throats too much – we started booing our troops as if they were heels. And now, I got a job to make people cheer Fist, who’s gonna be a face turning heel that turns face, hopefully making the people start changing their mind about other veterans...

And I helped make such a character, when we got Fist to the ring. And the pro-wrestling fans loved the character. With LLW establishing itself nation-wide through Miller’s purchase of other promotions, and the number of fans tuning into our programming, we really did become a big, although somewhat covert, maker of the public opinion.

**** The gears were set into motion**

Training Armstrong wasn’t all that bad anymore, once he got broken that day. He realized, wrestlers do need to take bumps, need to take working kicks and punches and that the moves are generally designed to look painful, but you’re trying to protect each other from getting hurt. The biggest lesson that he had learned, though, was the difference between getting hurt or feeling pain.

You see, there’s a big difference between the two and most people don’t really care about it. Getting hurt will cause you pain. If you break somebody’s nose, you’ll hurt the person and the person will be hurt and will feel pain. On the other hand, if you chop a person across the chest, you won’t hurt the person, but the person will feel the pain. So, pro wrestling is not about avoiding pain, if you’re in that ring, you will get to feel pain. It’s about not hurting each other – meaning trying not to cause injuries.

Once he learned that, he started making progress and we were able to equip him with a set of moves: a shoulder tackle, a flying shoulder tackle, a clothesline, a body slam, a splash, even a dropkick... but we wanted a shoulder breaker. That wasn’t easy, as with such moves, it’s the guy performing it, who needs to take care of the other guy, and do a good job of it. Luckily, Fist really was strong. He wasn’t just a blown up steroid balloon, so he could pick you up, hold you up, walk around with you, slam you without releasing and picking you up again... so

basically what he needed was to practice, how to do it safely. We'd work on the moves Brogan suggested later.

Bass was training with him all the time and with his botch, he knew all about how badly you can screw a guy, if you don't take care during the power moves. Barney, with his years of wrestling and training skills, also his martial arts and armature background, was a big help. And let's not forget he was also street smart. I guess growing up in a rough neighbourhood, as a boy in a mixed race family with a black father and white mother, he was the target for both sides to pick on him. And that was the final ingredient we needed for Fist, when he makes his heel turn. We'd need some effective and bad ass moves, that really could take a guy out in a real fight, so Fist started training how to hit with elbows and knees, but those were dangerous moves for everybody involved and more often than not, Bass was scared shitless when they were trying moves out. But, it did get him recognition. It was like he was paying off for the mistake he made, by exposing himself to numerous potential botches. Luckily there were only some minor injuries, nothing serious, nothing that a good night massage and sleep wouldn't take care off.

And as he wasn't sleeping at my place anymore, that was not really my concern. Now that I was paying him, he got a room of his own.

In the eyes of the public, however, the gears were set into motion.

Right after POT, which, by the way, brought Max a pot of money, our magazine ran a story of proving who the rich kid manager's real dad was. Furthermore, Centy got my stories and got them published, how the cleaning maid, Hillary, got busted and confessed.

Two weeks later, I was taping a show, where I showed up as a manager, with nobody to manage. My guy was supposed to fight some mid-carder, but as he jumped ship, I was forced to fight the opponent myself, or else be forever banned from the company. I took two bumps, delivered a dropkick and took the finisher: a vertical suplex.

Now how's that for a manager face turn?

After I've lost the fight, Ducky would come to the ring, recognising me as his biological son, although he never had sex with my mother, with his private eye Peter Falk, Lieutenant Columbo himself, explaining how a full condom was stolen in order to extort Mr Rockshield down the line. The show ended with Ducky saying to me: "But I see you've got my genes, boy, as you didn't back out of a fight, even though you're not a fighter. Your mom might have been a low down cheat, but you've got heart, so I promise you, I'll get you a wrestler worthy of our family name and you're gonna manage him."

This, off course, was the opening to bring in Goldbrick, but we wouldn't do it right away. Ducky, before leaving, told Falk: "Find a guy worthy to be managed by my son!"

This had us tape some very expensive vignettes with Peter Falk searching for a perfect wrestler, but the star power of a major actor and a billionaire made this into a top story in mainstream media as well. As Centy was the one sending out stories, and it all got really huge, *thank you Steve for getting Falk in on this and blowing it out of all proportions*, they renegotiated Centy's deal and got him a regular contract to work for LLW as a PR guy and article writer. Now I wasn't just writing stories for him, we were both writing news articles, while I was doing all other stuff as well.

With stories and hype about me being a rich kid manager and multimillionaire Rockshield hiring Columbo to find me the best wrestler that money could buy, weeks turned into months

and while Barney and Bass were making Fist a lean, mean, jobber squashing machine, I was taking care of his character.

I was also making sure Smack will be involved, when the time comes for a hot chick to be introduced at Fist's side and as she was really eager to get as much exposure as possible. She's gonna be his groupie and I'd slowly fade out of the picture, staring background work only. After Fist's heel turn, he'd be hurting guys, so she'd be trying to change his ways, keep on believing in him, and act as a nurse, helping his victims. And naturally, jump to kiss him once he saves Brogan and makes his face turn. She was all for that.

Apart from working together, we got to see a lot of each other, when she moved in as my room mate, after her dad got home from the hospital. They still couldn't see eye to eye.

Spike stayed with him and he'd be telling me what was happening, how their old man was sorry for what happened to Smack and all. I even went there for a visit, apologising to Titus for the injuries, ensuring him I really knew nothing about it... and getting Smack's things along the way. She really couldn't stand to be near him. She never spoke about it after that cry when me and Bass first visited them, but I knew it hit her hard.

As I was living alone – with Bass moving out – it seemed fitting she'd crash at my place until she gets set. But it wasn't easy on me either. I was probably in love with her, but more than anything, I had a constant boner, wanting to impale her on my cock and explode. Somehow, I never had the guts to do anything about it. She seemed like a vulnerable friend, with me as the big protector... like the princess and a knight... only that the princess acted like a bully, whenever I'd want to become gentle. I knew it was a mask, especially as I knew what she was really like while bullying people, but if it helped her handle the situation, I wasn't going to pull that mask down. I wanted her to make the first move, so she wouldn't feel threatened... In other words, I wanted her to fuck my brains out with gratitude that I was helping her, and was getting frustrated because we didn't have any sex, because I was too much of a wuss to approach her and get some, or find out it's not gonna happen and move on.

******The rise and fall of Goldbrick***

The Vignette was finally shown, where Lieutenant Columbo found JF Armstrong at a yacht club, sunbathing, explaining how he is looking for a real man's challenge that this pampered nation can't offer anymore, at least not to guy who's been through as much as he has.

Lucky for us, Fist got more acting talent than he had wrestling talent, so we could use him in promos. His in-ring work did improve, however, so he could now be trusted to perform the basics chops and punches without knocking any teeth out or missing by a mile and do a shoulder breaker and a running body slam, without cracking the opponent's colour bone. He still couldn't really sell a move, but was getting there.

Bass was a patient punching bag for Fist to learn, but it was Barney, dad and even me, who really thought Fist the ropes. I was used as a practice doll for his first shoulder breaker, as I was much lighter than Bass. All I can say is OUCH!

Anyway, the public was really hyped about the debut of the guy Lieutenant Columbo found and Huey Rockshield payed to wrestle for his newly discovered biological son. We started taking Fist to house shows and taped them all. It was nine shows all together over the period of

two weeks, where he was squashing Bass like an elephant would a sour grape, comparing the performance and the crowd reactions. The roster was excited, as all who were in the locker on the shows got to meet Ducky, so even the main event guys hung around, if they had nothing scheduled.

The show we used, was taped early in October in Wisconsin, where we held a male strip tease pool party the night before, to get the ladies roused up.

Bass was, as usual, scheduled to fight Bink Mosely, a non-existing local talent who's trying to make it into the industry, when all of the sudden Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1 started pouring through the speakers and me coming to the ring. As I made my way through the ropes, Bass wanted to jump me, but the ref stopped him (showing Bass is supposed to be the heel). I grabbed the microphone from the announcer, who just explained the local boy gimmick of Bink Mosely, and start addressing the crowd.

"I'm truly sorry, dear people of Green Bay, that your local hero could not attend today, to dispose of this brute, but he had a car accident. Still, as I don't want to deprive you of the pleasure of seeing this upstart beaten to a pulp, allow me to present to you JF Armstrong!"

The orchestral tune started playing all over again, and out came Goldbrick! A chiselled tanned specimen, looking like a Ken doll on steroids, in white boots, white trunks and a golden cape.

The crowd popped! There were many ring rats, who got unglued last night at the party, where Fist was the main attraction, although some were slightly disappointed that he didn't wear thongs to the ring.

Immediately when they locked up, Fist pushed Bass into the corner. It was sold perfectly. Now, this time, instead of coming out slow and locking up again, Bass ran towards Fist, with both hands raised for the axe handle blow, but Fist caught him and hoisted him for the shoulder breaker. Upon dropping Bass's shoulder on his knee, Fist stood up, holding his opponent in the same position and started running towards the other corner for the running body slam. It was all over in about a minute, but worked perfectly.

That's when I grabbed the microphone again, telling the ladies that one of them will get a chance to kiss Mr JF Armstrong and we both looked over the crowd to select Smack, who was in the third row, there was Spike sitting at her side.

She came to the ring and as they kissed and hugged, she looked down towards his manhood and said: "Why Mr Armstrong, I believe I'll call you Goldbrick!"

That's when Spike would make his way to the railing shouting: "Don't you dare touch my sister!"

The segment was great, so we used it and brought Spike in on the story. In an interview, he said: "I don't care how rich this Goldbrick is, my sister's engaged to a good man and I won't let her ruin her future." This good man was off course Smooth, who'll be the first to beat Fist. But that was for the finale, as Fist couldn't really sell yet, and would be hard to put him in a longer match. Until then we'd have Bass wanting a rematch, Spike fighting him, so he'd lay off his sister and here and again, we could use some other enhancement talent, or even me, as he'd need to split from his manager soon. And that's how we played it out.

The crowd, especially the women, started liking Goldbrick, so the men started hating him for it. There were more men in the audience. But they didn't hate him for what he was, as much as for the reactions he invoked in the ladies. Now, the planned thing was, for Smack to convince

JF to get rid of the manager, so they could be alone, and I even planned a few matches with Smack myself – the intergender manager vs valley match for the contract of the amazing Goldbrick.

In one of the matches, where Goldbrick held Spike in a nerve hold (we started making matches longer, so a few more elements were put in), I was yelling he should rip the guy's head off, while Smack was holding me back, telling him not to turn into a monster. I pushed Smack away and Goldbrick let go of Spike to jump outside the ring and confront me. In an argument with me, he got counted out, which was his first loss, blaming me for it.

He grabbed the mic, and started telling me: "You won't ever lay a hand on my woman again! And you won't ever get me to lose a match again!"

Then he raised me up on his shoulder and started running towards the ring post, to smash my head in, when Smack pulled my leg and got me down from Goldbrick's shoulder.

He started yelling at her: "What are you doing? I was going to punish him for hurting you!"

"That's not you, Goldbrick. You're not a monster! You wouldn't hurt a pipsqueak like this!"

So, I jumped up and started yelling at both of them: "Who are you calling a pipsqueak? And who the hell do you think you are, trying to ram me into the post! You'll both be sorry! You're fired and you..." I was turning towards Smack "...you're a..." SMACK! She smacked me right across the face.

"You and me, pipsqueak, inside the ring now!" Smack told me, with the microphone close by it was all picked up and heard by everybody in the crowd and on all the cameras.

This time, a guy jumped out of the crowd and pushed Goldbrick aside: "Hi baby, you've missed me?"

It was Smooth. Spike crawled to the apron, to give him a hand: "I was telling this people, she's engaged, but nobody would listen. And my sister... well, you know how stubborn she can be."

Smooth kissed Smack and Goldbrick just spat in their general direction. Me on the floor looking at the whole scene, not wanting to go after Goldbrick, who nearly broke me, but not wanting to hang around Smack, who smacked me. So, I hid under the ring. And Spike got his hand raised and called the couple in ring to celebrate.

I have to admit, not the best moment in wrestling history, but it got the job done.

We still had to turn Goldbrick into Fist and make his full heel turn. The press already started publishing stories with his Vietnam background and that his psychological profiles said he had difficulties with personal and working relationship, pointing that he could easily become a monster Smack was warning him not to become.

A week later, Smack and Smooth went to the ring in front of a big crowd, wanting to see what happens.

"Kid!" Max was asking me back stage, "I know we can tape it more than once, but as this is a hot item, the crowd will talk, so we should pull it off on the first take. Do you all know what to do?"

"Well, we've rehearsed the match many times. Every move is scripted and the cameramen are also in on it, so they'd know when to tape what. We're ready."

"No call on the fly?"

"No sir. Fist ain't ready for it yet."

When Smack got to the ring, she called me out: “Hey, pipsqueak! Last week you got lucky I forgot all about you, but I called you out and if you ain’t too yellow, you better come down here right now to face me in the ring!”

I came down to the ring, fully dressed, so everybody expected me to try and talk my way out of it. Instead, when I picked up a mic, Smack just smacked me again saying: “No talking. You didn’t talk last week, when you pushed me away, so you don’t get to talk this week either!”

I took my jacket off and the bell rang. I backed into the corner, acting confused and Smooth got out of the ring.

Smack came towards me, challenging me to charge at her, but I turned around to escape the ring, so she grabbed me by the belt like she was giving me a wedgie and pulled me to the middle of the ring. I just fell flat on my stomach and she just dropped an elbow on my lower back. I turned around and she put me in a figure four leg lock.

At this point, as I was really not wearing my wrestling gear and as I had the hots for Smack for ages and feeling her foot under my crotch while her breasts were bouncing around in front of my eyes, I felt an erection coming up. Smack realized it and started teasing me: “My, I can’t call you kid anymore, the way you’ve grown!”

Nobody could hear it except for me, and I didn’t care. I genuinely couldn’t take it anymore, feeling pre cum started dripping out, when she was rubbing her ankle against the crack of my ass, but there was nothing I could do! I had to wait for Fist to make his run in and beat the living crap out of all of us, so I was pretending to be in agony, while being ready to bust my load from both nuts.

Smack realized what was going on and while pretending to be gaining more leverage to make the hold more hurtful, she raised her hips to make a bridge. But she pretended to lose balance and fell to the side, so she flipped over and we were both on our stomachs, when she stood up, turned around, and put me in the camel clutch.

This wasn’t fully planned, but I was out of one submission into another, waiting for Fist to run in. Smack was really doing me a big favour. She decided not to embarrass me completely and while in the camel clutch, people couldn’t see my erection nor really see the moment and stain if I do jizz. Now she said: “Why didn’t you say something Timmy? I’d empty your balls before the march. I’d blow you off as many times as needed to make sure you couldn’t get it up during the match.”

This was it. I got a visual of that and rubbing my crotch to the ring I blew my load! I started twitching and cum started pouring in my pants, but nobody except Smack noticed. Especially, as this was the moment when Fist appeared! No more Goldbrick, but Fist, dressed up in army green, with camouflage face paint and everything. He jumped the railing, taking his own chair from the crowd with him, and hit Smooth over the head with it. Next, he slid under the ropes, and pulled Smack by the hair: “You were just playing with me, weren’t you?! Decide, that guy or me!”

Smack just slid out of the ring and people could hear her say: “With such an attitude, you can forget about me!”

Smooth getting to his feet, started laughing at Fist, so Smack added: “And you ain’t any better!”

Me, I was lying motionless, flat on my stomach, still twitching in orgasm, although people would think it was pain, realizing there's a wet spot under me, telling Fist in a low voice: "Just stomp me on the back, spit at me, and make a baseball slide under the rope to hit Smooth."

It was planned for him to pick me up over his head and drop me to the outside of the ring on top of Smooth, but I really didn't want his hand on my crotch as he'd raise me over his head – and neither did he want to grab me in my creamed pants, but he didn't know what happened.

"You make me sick!" He yelled at me, and stomped my ribs, spat and ran towards Smooth.

It was Smack who realized something went wrong, so she came to the other side, just as Fist's feet hit Smooth on the chin, dislocating his jaw.

"What is wrong with you? You ain't a man, you're a monster! Get away from me, get away from all of us." Smack started yelling, so Fist ran backstage, somewhat confused.

Again, it turned into somewhat of a mess, so we adopted the story, but the point was over. Smack was with neither, Fist was called a monster and in a fight with a chick... also beating a defenceless manager, so he was a heel and I could start fading away from the public eye all together.

"That wasn't what I expected," Max started saying in the locker room. "You sure, you got it all scripted?" He looked at me and my pants.

"Never planned for the broken rib, but we got the job done, didn't we?"

The era of Jason "Fist" Armstrong was born and the pre-prepared promos could be shown.

Chapter VII: Make them love it

** The calm before the storm*

I was waiting at the hospital next day, so they'd release me. They kept me overnight, to make sure, there was no internal bleeding or something... or just because it was paid for. Max left a message, that I don't have to attend the debriefing this time, until my ribs healed. I was hoping dad, or maybe Smack would be waiting for me to get out... or at least Bass, but I guess they all had work to do. We were still going at lightning phase. A familiar face still showed up, it was Barney. Too bad he didn't have any fresh pants for me, but at least the stain dried out.

"Goldbrick's making promos and stuff, so I have a day off. Need a ride?"

"By the way, goldbrick says he's sorry. Wanted me to let you know." Barney added as I was getting into his rusty old pickup.

"Thanks. That's mighty nice of him, I guess."

"More than you know kid. Many times, people forget the collaterals. But then again, he still didn't hit the payload, so his true colours might still shine through."

Can't argue with that cynical truth.

"So, how's the rib?"

"It ain't that bad. Isn't broken, just hurts a lot."

"Oi, that's a shame now, with that filly you've got living with you. She's not the one that bit you, right?"

"Nah, that one's long gone from the company."

He laughed: "Be careful, the industry recycles everything it can use, so if she was a part of the company once, you can bet your life she'll be with the company again – sooner or later."

I started thinking of how dad used to be a wrestler, and returned to ring after all those years, to become a member of the lab, a commentator, a booker and so on... "Maybe you're right Barney, maybe you're right. Btu right now, I'm hungry."

"Know a good place to get a bowl of chili – you're paying."

"You're on, that's the least I could do for a guy, picking me up at the hospital."

He took me to a place, behind some warehouse, or slaughter house, or something... There were many rough looking guys there. Guess life wasn't easy on them.

"Hi Barnsey! Brought new meat?"

"The kid's all right, we're training a guy together down at the gym."

"This kid helps you train somebody?"

"Yup, I'm the punching bag." I jumped into the conversation between the guy behind the bar and Barney. "And I'm hungry. Barney brought me in for chili, says yours is the best in town."

"Jeff, two chilis!" He yelled to the kitchen and started pouring beer from the tap. "And what'll you have kid?"

"I'm with Barney, so whatever he's having."

Barney winked at me saying to the barman: "Told you he's all right. It's Dan's boy."

“Shot-knee Sawyer’s kid?” He poured a third beer for him and raised the glass: “To your old man, kid. One of the most honest bouncers I’ve ever had.”

“See kid,” Barney started, “Once upon a time, these were the places where wrestlers learned how to toughen up. They’d be working as bouncers, or butchers, or construction... men’s work. And they’d be wanting to fight, so they’d pick up extra bucks. That world is gone now. I don’t get guys like goldbricks. We had to make him cry, so he’d start learning. If it were not for the money, I’d be kicking his sorry ass out of the gym. But Max’s paying me good and goldbrick gets much more... so who am I to complain. But I have to know, where’s this world going to? You’re young, you’re the new generation... is it all going down the sewer?”

I saw some bitterness in his eyes, I’ve never seen with anybody before.

“I mean, look at us. All of us here. We broke our backs, slaved our asses off, so the next generation can have a better place... only to find they don’t deserve it. Ain’t that right fellas?”

Only then, did I realize, some other people were looking at us, listening to what Barney was saying.

“Nothing personal, you’re all right, but there’s so many nut jobs in the world today... It’s like people are doing their fighting with lawyers and writing complaints. Nobody just settles the score anymore. And you can see that in the business too. Sure, shoots still happen, but the old code is gone. What I’m saying is – you didn’t even get mad at goldbrick for cracking your rib. I’d mash him into the pulp just for showing me disrespect in the ring. You gotta pay your dues first, get the rewards later.”

“But you know, Barney,” I carefully started budging in, “He wasn’t ready and didn’t really broke my rib. Like you’ve said, back in the days, you wouldn’t even let him train... today, he’s out there, getting a push in the ring, because they want to make money off him.”

“They are making a god damn cartoon show out of wrestling, letting such phoneys in.”

The rest of the guys just nodded.

“And it’s like that everywhere,” Barney kept on, “bosses aren’t bosses any more. Officers aren’t officers any more... even the mobsters aren’t mobsters any more. The world’s gone soft.”

What could I say. I was glad when chili came, so I started eating. But I was thinking all of the while... maybe that’s part of what we are doing. Taking the real life edge off the things, by making our characters more cartoonish, more over the top, so you can’t relate to them in real life situations... we’re getting like the movies and nobody gets really wild over a movie. I mean, if wrestlers represented real butch men, standing up for their beliefs in the past, as Barney was hinting, were toning that down.

When Brogan was the top face, you could get behind him, and when he turned heel, people jumped the rails, to protect me from him.

Now, Fist got a bit of heat, but there was no outrage. It will be interesting to see, when they both turn face again. How will the people react?

Damn, I’m getting to be a real nerdy lab rat.

“Would you mind, if I stay here, kid? There’s a bus stop two blocks down that-a-way.”

“That’s OK Barney, I’ll manage.” I left a hefty tip.

Walking would do me good. This was the first time, I started thinking of the world that’s getting abandoned. If we are moving on with such speed, really, what will happen to the way things used to be? How will the people, who can’t keep up with the change, handle it? Should I even worry about any of that? Or should I just mind my business, get paid and be able to move

to a new neighbourhood, get a car and settle down. But wouldn't this be part of my business? If we're really making people's opinions for them, aren't we then also responsible for their predicaments?

Thank god for the bus, I was getting too deep in my thoughts. I'll just head towards down town, because right now, I don't even know where I am.

Took me forever to get back home and Smack was already there.

"Started worrying. Though Barney would pick you up."

"He did, but got lost in the past along the way."

Smacked gave me a puzzled look, then started laughing: "You really jazzed last night, haven't you."

I blushed.

"Bet I could make it happen again!" She said and started walking towards the shower.

I was getting hard again. Is this the chance I was waiting for?

I followed her in, and she was already stripping down her clothes.

"Let's get you clean. I bet the night nurse at the hospital didn't give you a sponge bath. You stink." Smack said, starting to unbutton my shirt, with her breasts staring at me.

As she opened the water, I saw how the cold made her nipples harden, but she only bit her lip, and walked butt first towards the wall, inviting me to follow her, so I'd get wet too. I got naked in a flash and stepped forth, following my other head.

"Ain't you happy to be home. About time you came in."

With Hill it was all about her playing with me... with Clara and Sarah it was all about they wanting to have their trophies... but with Smack, it wasn't like fucking at all. It was like we were really making love. I didn't pay attention to what I was doing, I was just natural, and so was she.

"You're my first ugly guy, pipsqueak, so I guess I must be in love with you."

I just shut her up by kissing, so we had a shoot wrestle match with our tongues, while I was pressing her towards the wall, with her one leg wrapped around my ribs – the side that wasn't hurt – both heavily breathing through our noses.

We were making the whole place wet, moving from the shower, to the kitchen table, to the couch... when she was sitting on me, bouncing like a jockey, when I wanted to pick her up, so I wouldn't knock her up.

"Don't worry about the juices, just let them go!"

I stopped fighting, and she just set down on it, started grinning, so my juices started pouring out like I had a garden hose down there, but she wouldn't stop. I was in ecstasy, both physically, as it was the best sex I had in my life, and emotionally, as I wanted to do this for so long, so I started rubbing her shoulders, hugging her, like I held a cello in my hands, trying to play a beautiful melody on it, when she finally stopped. She turned sideways and crawled up my lap, like a little girl would, hugging me and leaning on my shoulder.

"You never need to worry about knocking me up..." she was saying with a sad voice, holding back the tears, "I'm never gonna be able to have babies, because of that night." And the dam holding back all the sadness and disappointment fell.

I was holding her in my arms, not saying a word, not really understanding the full depth of what I've heard. I just knew we were to kids, knowing each other for a very long time, with a lot of emotional issues... me possibly being in love and her being really depressed.

“Now what kind of a woman am I, if I have nothing ready for my pipsqueak to eat?” She said after a while, opening the fridge. “Want Chinese left overs?”

“Let’s share them, while we’re waiting for the pizza to arrive.” I’ve said.

**** *Fury of the Fist***

That night we shared the bed, and she was all gentle and stuff..., but kept calling me pipsqueak.

“We gotta be down in the gym tomorrow, all of us, you know. Brogan will show Fist how to make the chinlock slam. Max said, we’ll go over the details on how to work out the whole programme.”

That meant I’ll see dad. I was looking forward to that.

“And, we’ll have to see, how to make you a sexy nurse, following Fist, trying to take care of the people he beats up along the way.”

“Kindda like I’m doing now?” She asked, making the way with her hand from the ribs to the crotch.

“Yes ma’am.” I said, turning carefully, while going for another ride in the tunnel of love, rocking us both gently to sleep.

The pain woke me up first, so I made us coffee.

“I could get used to that.” She said, when her nose recognised the smell.

So, could I, I was thinking to myself. So, could I.

After breakfast, I got us a cab, to take us to the gym. Everybody was gathering there. All the jobbers and mid-carders that were training, and even a few names like Mitch, Sand Gene, O’Toole, Winston the Ape-man, Brady, were there. Even Centy, I guess what we say, will be part of the news or magazines.

“Listen up,” Brogan started, “As this is really a new and dangerous move.”

But we all knew it wasn’t about Brogan’s new move... they all wanted to see Fist, knowing he’s gonna be the next big thing, the new face of the company!

“You put the guy in the chinlock, like this, you see.” He was demonstrating on Zippy, one of the local boys, who’s never been in a match without a mask before.

“Then make sure his head is not stuck next to your hip, so it releases, when you snap sideways and push with the hand you’re applying the lock. It’s at this point the opponent must make his jump, going into a helicopter spin away from you, landing flat on the belly.”

Zippy did. It looked OK, like his neck really was snapped like a twig.

“And that’s the move, I’m teaching Fist, to put his guys away. How does it look?”

“We gotta make sure, to never show the camera angle filming him from the front.” Mitch was saying. “You can see the head is out of the hold.”

“And all the opponents have to rehearse with him,” Brady said. “This move can snap their neck legit, if not done right.

“Right as always, guys. Love you for it.” Brogan said, and it seemed legit.

“What do you think, kid?” Brady said. “I mean, you’ve been working with him. Can he pull it off. It’s not like he’s hurt anybody, right?”

“Lay off,” Mitch said. “He only gave him a rib.”

They all had a laugh, and I got a feeling they had it out for me. I guess that's what Barney wanted to tell me yesterday, by bringing me into a surrounding full of people that saw me as nothing by a kid, my dad's kid, and I had to find my own way home. Thanks for the warning, or was it a lesson... neither's helping me right now.

Next thing that happened, however, was a total surprise. A girl, my age, dressed up as nurse, came to the ring. She was long-legged and skinny, but not workout skinny like Smack... she was spoiled skinny, like a girl that never has to do anything physical, so she just doesn't need to put any muscle on her bones... she was a curly hair brunette, with a huge rack, and looked kind of familiar, I just didn't know where to place her.

"Get a stretcher over here, this poor boy got hurt!" She let out a yell, while standing outside the ring.

"No, honey, you have to start making your way up the stairs, to look bigger, then while bending between second and third rope, you pull your head up and call for the stretcher."

That was Brady, giving her advice, how to look good for the camera, how to play off her rack, to show she's got it, without looking like a cheap stripper.

"Like this?" She climbed the steps and leaned under the top rope in Zippy's direction.

Smack pulled me by the elbow, asking: "Is that Suzy? Bosses daughter?"

Off course she was! Now I get it... The nurse was there as eye candy only, so no need for a chick who can wrestle, right. So, Max probably decided to push his daughter into the deal.

"Nothing against you, Legs, but if you're shooting for the stars, you gotta earn it." Mitch came from behind us. "You planning to be a wrestler, you gotta wrestle. The angle you and the kid had, wrestling each other, that was great, so we'll use that. You beat him up in the ring a few more times and the you get a real challenge. Ever heard of Grindstone Genny? She'll come in in two weeks' time, claiming to be the best female wrestler ever. She'll start smack talking you, how you can do nothing but rough up little pipsqueaks, so you challenge her to a fight. You better be ready by then, as it's gonna be a two out of three title fight, and the winner goes home the first LLW women's champion shown on TV."

We both looked at him, not knowing what to think.

"Come now, kid, you didn't think you're the only one around here who writes stories?"

Brady was talking to Suzy and Brogan on the other side of the ring, while Mitch was behind me and Smack, when some weird sound effect started playing. Zippy got up and the Winstone grabbed the mic: "Introducing first, standing in the ring at 230 pounds, Skipping Zip! And making his way down to the ring area is Jason "Fist" Armstrong!"

Fist came out in full camouflage, sneak his way to the ring... Max right there behind him. But, instead of climbing into the ring, Fist just dove under it and Zippy started turning around, to see where his opponent would show up. Naturally, it was behind Zippy's. Fist showed Zippy forth and he fell for the ropes, holding on to them, like holding for his dear life. The bell rang and Fist moved in for a lockup. Zippy put his hands up, but Fist kicked him to the gut, put him in the chinlock and did the slam. Zippy was flat on his stomach, when Fist did the first drop right on the back of his neck, then turned him over on the back, covering him for the pin count. Max, at the side of the ring, slammed his palm on the canvas for a three count and the bell rang again. Fist got up, raising his hands, while Suzy started making her way towards the ropes, leaning in towards Zippy and just at the point as gravity revealed the full size of her breasts, she raised her head, letting a curly lock drop down the nurses hat, calling for the stretcher!

“Now that’s what the fury of the fist is all about!” Max said. “That was perfect.”

“Like kid’s play.” Brady said, everybody started laughing.

OK, they were really rubbing it in.

“Don’t take it personal, kids.” Mitch told both of us. “These is the big leagues, and everybody cuts in. We just have to work out the Battle Royal so that Fist comes out really strong and over, then Brogan will work out their double face turn. You didn’t think, you had enough leverage to start manipulating everybody’s career now, did you Kid? And you, Legs, you’re not gonna waste your fighting skills on cat walking up and down the ring... that’s for spoiled rich kids like Suzy.”

“Welcome to the big leagues.” I heard my dad’s voice say, when he was walking in from behind me. He showed no emotion whatsoever. “Welcome to the world, where big choices are made by big people.”

OK, that was his way of publicly saying, he didn’t even have the time to warn me and somebody with higher rankings muscled in on my plan.

“How do you like the show Kid?” Max was asking, making his way towards us. “I think the new nurse is just perfect, don’t you?”

Smack was shooting lightnings from her eyes, but Mitch had his hand around her shoulders, mumbling in a low voice: “Don’t do anything stupid Legs.”

“Hi, I’m Suzy! You must be Timmy, right? And I bet you’re Jenny, Nick’s girl. How’s your father anyway? Haven’t seen him wrestle for a while.” She was saying in an innocent voice, waving at us.

“Hi.” I said. “Hello.” Smack added.

“Let’s pull up some chairs, they’re not just hitting props, you know.” Dad said.

The jobbers were going about their training, filling up the rings, going for the equipment, while the rest of us, Winston, O’Toole, and all the other names sat down on the collapsible chairs, near the blackboard, even Ducky came from someplace in the back, with a martini in his hand.

“So, we got enough guys here, to job for Fist. We really must start showing him beating a different guy each week, otherwise it’ll become boring for the TV shows. We’ll also make it one more move each match. Will you handle that Fist?” Max was asking.

“Sure will. You guys have done a better job preparing me to act the fights out in front of the camera that they did in all the months before. I mean, sorry kid, I didn’t want to smash your rib in and all, but you and the old man were teaching me some holds and how to fall and all the stuff I won’t need... instead of teaching me to win TV matches!”

All of the wrestlers, including Brogan, tightened their lips at this statement. Sure, them going through all the bumps, it was clear that me and Barney were teaching him to wrestle, not to act as a character in the ring. But they said nothing. Like I figured, and Barney couldn’t, enough money is pouring in and that makes even the hardcore old school guys change their ways.

“And then we need a Battle Royal, to make Fist show, he’s the toughest son of a bitch in the ring!” Max went on. “What will we do? And when will we do it?”

“We need to put it on a pay-per-view event.” Brogan said. “And it has to happen soon enough, to have a build up for the POT-5.”

“We could make it part of the New year’s tour.” Winston suggested.

“Nah. It’s too early, besides, it’s a tour. We’re only showing highlights of it on TV. It’s not a PPV.” Max dismissed the idea.

“So, we have to make a new show in between. I bet Kid has an idea what to do, as he was planning Fist’s career all out.” Suzy said, with a glitter of pure evil in her eye, but a voice smoother than a baby angle’s butt covered with melted butter.

“Off course, if the Kid’s not suggest, I’ve got an idea.” Suzy went on without waiting for me to say something or not.

So that was all about. Max wanted his daughter to muscle in. Maybe he wanted to show Ducky, she’s better for it than me... or maybe he wanted to show Ducky this is the Miller family business and not the Huey show.

“Valentine’s massacre!” Suzy seemed to be proud of herself. “It’s almost three months before the POT and we can build up any kind of story for the big show.”

“That’s a great name for the show!” Brogan said. Fist was just nodding his head.

“But...” O’Toole interrupted, “...it has to be really bloody. It was a gangster’s feast. So, there’s got to be hard hitting action.” So, he’s making a comeback at a big heel, butchering people along the way.

“Don’t worry, Tooty, I’ll drop the belt to you there, but you won’t be cutting me open! If I bleed, I do it myself – got that?” Brady said to O’Tool. So, he’s in on the show too, and O’Tool is getting another heel push, this time as the All American Champion, until Fist takes it away.

I wanted to jump in with some comments, to take the spotlight away from Suzy, but I’ve decided to listen first, they obviously had a course laid out for this and interrupting mid ways would only have them come back at me even harder.

Brogan started talking again: “Also, I’ll start bleeding at the hands of my attackers. We’re bringing a new team over from west coast, calling them the Arabian Knights.”

“I’ll be leading them to the ring in the opening fight of the night.” Gene jumped in. “They’ll be my sons of the desert fraction. We’ll get more people in later.”

It all made sense. And I did bring this upon myself. Wanting to have so many stories come together for the sake of Fist... I did bulldoze the paths of other wrestlers.

“I’ll be portrayed as the most likely wined of the battle royal, that’s why Gene will be taking me out, his boys attacking me. Then Fist comes in and takes my place at the Battle Royal, and Suzy the nurse, here, helps me backstage, becoming my manager and I make my face turn. In the time until POT we’ll be making promos and I’ll invite Fist so we’d fight the Arabian Knights together in a tag match.”

Now Mitch jumped in: “And after Fist wins the battle royal, this time not putting anybody in the stretcher, Legs here...” he said is so many times, it caught on, “...will re-join him in the ring, saying something along the lines – I knew you weren’t a monster. They’ve made up, and Fist is on the way to be the face, while he says – and you stood up to that pipsqueak too, gave him, what was coming to him. That way, we show here as a legit wrestler, and she can start real competition against women wrestlers.”

“And all of this will be shown globally, as we not only bought out the West coast, but also made a deal with UK and Australian broadcasts... se we’re showing up in almost every English speaking household on their TV screens!” Max was so happy, and Ducky patted him on the back.

Mitch gave me a nudge with an elbow, letting me know, I better say something too, but hit the broken rib, so I just grind my teeth with pain.

“You don’t like the idea, kid?” Max was provoking.

“Love it, I said coughing. It’s just that we need a special battle royal. We’re making a new show and it’s going global. We should show them something they’ve never seen before.”

Now everybody turned towards me, only Suzy piercing me with hate. I wanted to bring her down, so as she had the Valentine’s massacre idea, I went after this, making ideas up as I went along.

“Three months would be too long. If you’re not letting Fist fight, he’d underexposed. If you let him fight, it’s gonna be the same match again, but he needs a better sand off. That’s why the event has to be closer to POT than three months.”

Brogan and Max looked at each other, but kinda suggested, they don’t want to disagree with me.

“Now what would make sense for it, the event would be built around this new battle royal type of match. I suggest we call it COUNTDOWN, as it begins the countdown to POT. In should be 40 days before POT, because there will be 40 people in the battle royal.”

“Bullshit! 40 guys in the ring at the same time... that’s too much. There will be no action. You can’t get it on camera!” Suzy started yelling at me, as I hit her nerve with cancelling the Valentine’s idea.

“You would want all of the guys in at the same time, wouldn’t you?” I was insinuating she’s a slut, but only after she opened the door for my comeback, so most of the guys laughed, only Max got serious, with Ducky patting his shoulder again, telling him to ease up, and Max said: “So what kind of battle royal did you have in mind?”

“Like I’ve said – countdown! Imagine 40 guys, divided in 4 teams of 10. Four guys, one from each team starts the match. As soon as a guy hits the floor outside the ring, the guy’s eliminated and another guy for his team comes in.”

Most of the people gathered started considering the idea.

“That way you can have three guys ganging up on one... you can have nine people in one team eliminated and have the last guy fight a valiant battle. And when there’s only one team left, you have all the members left in that team in the ring at the same time, battling it out – as there are no friends. There’s just so many combination you can go through, and as Fist is the lone wolf, this is the best way to put him over.... Have him be the third or fourth on his team, so some of the competition is already out, then let him do some throwing out and get beaten, but not eliminated. While the others fight it out some more, he rests a bit, coming out strong when other teams are on their last men. Fist eliminates them, comes across strong, crowd thinks it’s over, but then rest of Fist’s team jumps him as it’s every man for himself. So he fights another uphill battle, to come out as the toughest and most durable guy the crowd ever did see. So when Grace Powers comes to the ring, to testify he’s no monster, the crowd is sure to pop and he’s over!” I kept on.

“Sounds nice an all, kid, but you don’t get enough time to build the Arabian Knights to become the Tag Champions before POT, so there’s no foreign heel team for Fist and me to take their belts away.” Brogan jumped in, Suzy looking at him almost like a puppy looks at you when he brings you the ball to play with him.

“No, that’s why they should get the belts before they jump you at the Countdown. That’s why I believe the Valentine’s massacre is a good idea, just not for the battle royal!”

Once more, I was saving my ass. Realizing just in time, I shouldn’t squash the idea of Max’s daughter. They obviously made plans for it and I don’t want to make enemies. I started presenting like both I’ve never tried to shoot down Suzy’s idea and I’m just adding to what they all suggested.

“I love the massacre idea, but since the New Year’s tour is from mid to end of January, why not make the Valentine’s final event of the tour and put it on paper view. So, all the fights at the tour culminate at the event and we tease the people with highlights, making them wanna see the PPV so much more? The Arabian Knights take the belts, after almost getting them all throughout the tour. O’Tool gets the All American belt... We can even have a classical battle royal, having Brogan win, making him the favourite to win the Countdown, that’s why the Gene wants to take him out.

Also, have Fist comment the changing of the All American belt, ranting about how unfair it is that a Scotsman and an Irishman were fighting for the American belt... and how he wants it. That way we have legitimacy for his single run to get the title, after the tag with Brogan breaks apart.

It’s a win-win situation. We get enough stories for two big events, both on pay per view, one feeding of the other, capitalizing on the New Year’s tour.” I felt Mitch hand on one and dad’s hand on the other shoulder... they were proud of me.

“And since we’ve struck a deal with other countries, the New Year’s tour should happen abroad, to really make it a tour, starting in Canada, going to Australia and Zealand, until stopping in UK and finally come back home for the big finale – like Kid suggested making a big deal out of their return, at a show Suzy proposed – the Valentine’s massacre. I love it!” Ducky said, basically leaving Max no choice but to agree, although he was already for it, as it didn’t hurt what his daughter suggested.

Everybody started nodding heads.

“Great work everybody. That’s what I like – teamwork, not some individual crap any kid could pull out of his ass.” Max concluded, showing he was annoyed that they weren’t able to back me into a corner I couldn’t get out off.

“And you, Legs, will get your chance after the POT, when you make good with Fist, to start your own career. I’ll make sure of that.” Mitch was saying to Smack, obviously trying to take her under his wing. “I’ll be coaching the women’s division myself. Have the plans for the title and all, so I’ll have to take your measurements later on.”

He was really hitting on her, and just after last night, when we declared love, and I had such big hopes...

She just kept quiet all the time at the gym.

“OK, now people, everybody back to work, I’m not paying you to stand around!” Max said, pulling Ducky aside. “You’re covering, if this flops?”

“I told you Max, we’re gonna rule the world. You and me, with me backing you all the way. Have I ever tried to weasel out of the deal?”

We’re going global, was I could think about when everybody was dispersing. We’re going global and I’m way over my head. It overwhelmed me so much, I didn’t see Jenny’s

disappointed look, when she went with Mitch to give the measurements, that I never put up a fight for her.

As soon as they were out of site, Suzy came up to me: "I appreciate it. I thought you'd want to scratch my eyes out, but instead you made my story a part of your and outshone me. That's class."

"So is you, coming here to admit it. Thank you. I really did like the idea. Did you come up with it yourself?"

"You boys think you're the only ones, who can come up with stuff? I have it in me too, you know. You're not the only one with talent oozing out of your body. But I have to admit, yours is big!"

I liked this kind of talk. It was arousing... we were getting to know each other, getting to give each other compliments, but at the same time, it felt that every word was meant to be a threat! I has getting hard for her now, and it hasn't even been a whole day, since I felt the joy and love of being in bed with Smack. It was then it hit me, what Mitch was actually up to.

"Sorry Suzy, there's something I gotta take care off." I said, turning towards the door Mitch and Smack went through.

"Yes, nice almost meeting you, Tim." I heard her say.

**** A man or a fan?*

I hear Mitch talking rather loudly at Smack: "...at all. It don't make any difference to me. This is business and you're gonna listen to what I say now, or else you're not in it!"

"But we have it planned out! Timmy's taking care of me!"

"I don't give a rat's ass about that! Take off those pants right now..."

That's when I burst in, to hear the rest of Mitch's comment, "...and gear up for the ring!"

"What's going on here?" I asked, a bit confused I could actually open the door. From what I imagined I heard, I figured it would be locked and Mitch making passes at Smack, or worse. But, the door just gave way and they were fighting over her getting in the ring today.

"He's planned my career out for me, for the next two years. He says he's going to be in charge of training us girls to fight and that they've got me a whole bunch of opponents, to push me to the top, but you're nowhere in the picture."

"Sure, he's not. He's not in the wrestling anymore, he's one of Steve's guys now, so he helps with angles... he doesn't write them, he has no creative control, unless he convinces the rest of us, who're doing the booking and stuff. Great job, by the way, Kid, on the show you put up before. Countdown... I'll help you out on that one, if I can get the annual share of the match."

I was looking at Mitch, not really understanding what he meant, but then remembered, the bookers get a share of the shows they book, so every new type of match is another source of income for them.

"I have to talk to Steve about it first." I've said to buy time.

"I understand. There's probably a team of you, down at the lab, who came up with the concept. Guess they're really not a complete waste of time. Let me know by the end of the week though. And now you Legs... Why aren't you still in gear to fight! There's boots your size, trunks, and you can keep your bra and t-shirt on."

“Because, I don’t take orders from you, baldy! I asked pipsqueak over here to take care of me, and he’s been doing a good job of it so far... then you come in an butt in... and that blonde boob bouncer takes my spot as the nurse... and I just hate this industry!!!”

Smack was really grumpy, I must say.

“And you, pipsqueak, you only show up now? What, did Suzy hypnotise you? Don’t tell me your eyeballs weren’t in synch with her boob swaying, because I saw it. And when this guy takes me away, you say nothing! If you’re not ready to fight for me, why the hell did I let you fuck me last night?! I trusted you, but you turned out to be a total wuss!”

“Hey, take it out on the equipment, Legs! Go on the leg press and don’t stop pumping until I come around to call you. You obviously don’t want to get in the ring.”

Smack was so frustrated, she left hollering: “And stop calling me Legs!”

Mitch made this face, a kid provoking his mom after she’d just forgiven him would make and sat down. “The two of you got quite some issues I guess. Are you an item?”

“Don’t know.” The question caught me by surprise, and I’ve learned it’s best to play dumb, otherwise you let the truth out.

“Look, it’s none of my business, but if you don’t know, you’re just playing her. So, you better find out, are you her man or her fan?”

At my age now, I can really appreciate the question and understand what it meant. But back then I was just a kid, who was barely getting to understand life, and wouldn’t know the difference between the two, if it was drawn out for me on the wall I was about to hit at 60mph.

“You’re taking over the women’s division?” I asked Mitch, hearing a knock at the door. Dad joined us.

“That’s right. Now that we bought out the West Coast Pro Stars Grapplers, we finally have enough fighting girls, and as I’m not getting any younger, I’m gonna be a trainer and manager... getting my own stable of girls. Maybe that pimp character you set up should give me a call. We could work out an angle and I could fight him for a big match or two. Should get his career going. I’d just take 10% of his pay-out, if he gets a push. I ain’t greedy.”

“Forget it Mitch. He’s not the star quality yet, to be getting a contract.”

“Look Dan, if he and I main event a few B shows, he’ll get the push.”

“Mitch’s right, Timmy. Call your pall Smooth. It will only do him good. Have them hook up and think of a programme.”

There was so much more to think about... all the characters, all the career paths... more than I could imagine. More than I could handle.

“Now tell me, how’s the rib holding up?”

“It’s fine dad, it’s not really broken, just hurts.”

“We all know how that feels, kid. We’ve all been there before.” Mitch explained.

“Coughed any blood, son?”

“No, dad. Where were you yesterday? I was kinda hoping you’d pick me up at the hospital. Instead I got Barney.”

“Don’t get sour over your old man, Kid. We were going over all angles and he was in on it the whole time, making sure, you won’t get screwed out of your deal with Ducky about Fist.”

“Besides, I told Barney to smarten you up for today. Guess he did a damn good job. Didn’t know he was such a great teacher.”

“He gave me a lesson, alright. Thanks for looking after me, dad. Can I be left alone for a while now, to sort some things out in my head?”

“He’s got the hots for Nik’s girl.” Mitch told dad. “I suggest you do your thinking by the speed bag.”

“Mitch is right. Try venting some of the pressure out and hit the shower.”

Didn’t plan on any exercise today, but with all the tension and my nerves acting up on me, it might be a good idea just hitting something. I can always say my rib started hurting or something and stop, if I change my mind.

Getting out there, to start punching the speed bag, I saw Smack pumping the led press, shaping her buttocks, with her sweaty long dark hair falling down to the floor and her compact breast standing firm under the t-shirt, raising and sinking as she was taking deep breaths.

Further down was Brogan, talking to Suzy, with her huge boobs almost pushing him away, while her wide round ass was leaned to the wall, to take some pressure of the shapely but short legs. Her hair looked a lot different now, as she had a wave of it hiding most of her face away, so I guess it was tucked under the nurses hat before, just letting this one long curl out for the public to see.

Smack accused me of eyeing Suzy... well, now I really was. They’re both so different, one seems so hard and hot, the other so soft and sexy. I guess it was Smack’s comment that she let me fuck her last night, that really got to me. I mean, I was wanting that and I loved it, but I didn’t want her to be playing me. Damn, emotions are confusing. Now I understand what they mean with sexual frustration. We’ll have to work it out tonight... until then, I’ll just watch her work out... or Suzy talk. Speed bag, you better be ready for some serious fury to be released upon you as I really am working up a testosterone tension nothing but a good bashing can ease up. I wonder, is that what women mean when they call us guys pigs... I god with Smack what I always wanted, and already I was getting distracted by another woman, because Smack wasn’t interesting anymore?

I didn’t even see Brogan come up to me, when he said: “Kid, I know you’re doing this for Ducky, so neither me nor Max can do anything about it. But if you have Fist outshine me, I’ll tear your balls off and stuff your ears with them, so you won’t hear how loud you’re yelling from pain of me ripping your cock off and stuffing it up your ass. Is that clear? Now keep up the good work.”

Suzy came swaying by, smelling good: “My, he’s got quite an interest in your private parts. Has some creative suggestions for what to do with them too.”

I stopped punching. “What were the two of you talking over there?”

“Oh, we share a few interests.” Suzy said, while lowering her eyes towards my budging pants. “Only I have a gentile approach.”

I saw Smack looking over and started punching the speed ball again, but the quick raising of the hand cost me a sharp pain in the rib, so I leaned forward, Suzy catching me not to fall.

“I best be off, dad’s waiting for me in the limo outside.”

“Yeah, see you.” I said, trying to straighten up.

Upon letting me go completely she said: “We should do this again. Bye-bye now.”

She left me visibly bulging, with Smack coming over and me looking her from head to toe.

She slapped me and said: “You better tell me, that’s from watching me work out and not from talking to that blubber boob.” And she grabbed me by the crotch, me getting ever harder.

“Now that’s the honest response. And don’t you forget it.” She said, and slapped me again. “No go hit the shower and keep it down until we get home.”

Yeah, that was the Smack I remembered from school. Maybe the thought girl was all a mask to hide her vulnerable side, but I sure as hell didn’t like being treated that way. I made up my mind I’ll be moving to a different place, where there won’t be enough room for both of us. And close to a library.

**** *Outrunning the truth*

That evening I told Smack I decided to cancel rent and that we have two weeks to empty the place. I started giving her some crap about how the change of programme made me lose money and I have to move in with dad for a while, and I think she should too. She just started crying and said: “Sure. I keep pushing all the wrong buttons with people.”

“You’re not pushing them, you’re slapping them like you were in a gameshow.”

“Want me to kiss the booboo away, little boy?”

I’d want her to kiss the little boy, so it would grow big and strong. I felt so horny. I know being half naked in bed with a hot chick will do that to you, but I wasn’t getting horny for Smack. It was Suzy I was smelling.

“Forget it.” I’ve told her and turned away, thinking how fast she stopped crying, when a chance to put me down arose. “I’ll start packing tomorrow.”

Next day, I wanted to see dad first, so I called and they told me he was in with Steve.

“Where are you off to, pipsqueak?”

“To the offices. You should go to the gym and meet up with Mitch.”

“We’re meeting at nine. I got time.” She said, while eating breakfast. “When are you coming back?”

“I don’t know.”

“Thought you were packing today.”

I just felt the provocation in her voice. She hated me. Not sure if for kicking her out, or suggesting she go to her dad, or for making up a lie about moving instead of simply throwing her out.

“Ladies first.” I’ve said, leaving before she could come up with a reply.

I got to Steve’s office, looking at various places along the way. I’d really love to move into this neighbourhood. But should I cancel my contract before I find a place? Move in with my dad for a while? Stay and try to make things right with Smack? Throw Smack out and break up with her? She’d probably just Smack me and stay at my place.

Will life always be this hard? I’m not even legally an adult, but already have to deal with so much shit! I have to convince somebody to get drunk with me tonight. I guess Bass would have some time to kill.

“Kiddo, what’cha doing here?” It was Centy.

“I’m meeting Steve.”

“And daddy, right? That was a hell of a deal you set me up for. I owe you. But I really got to tell you, you need to get along with the times and get a computer. That typewriter of yours is just an antique piece of junk. I’ve a whole editorial office at home.”

Was he fraternizing with me? Whatever, Bass is off the hook. I guess I'm getting drunk with Centy tonight.

"Can I come over to see it? Maybe you can advise me what kind of computer to get."

"Great. You bring pizza, I'll have beer ready and we can have a boys night – teaching you computing. You still got my address, right?"

A nerd's sleepover. I'll hate myself for it in the morning, but it sounded so much different to what I was used to, it sounded nice.

"You're both here, good!" Steve opened the door of his office, to give some letters to the secretary. "Get a delivery boy to take those out right now!" Then he turned towards us. "Please, come in, Dan and I have already started."

"So, what may I write about it?" Centy asked straight away, even before we made it to our seats. "That was a lot of material yesterday, and you, Timmy, pulled a white elephant out of your butt with that Countdown idea. Where do you come up with stuff like that?"

I blushed a bit and said: "It's a talent I was born with, I guess."

"Exactly!" Steve said. "And that's why we want to poke around your brains to see if we can copy it, but until then use it, so your brain is part of our meal ticket."

Dad laughed: "And the best part is, Steve is serious about it."

"Sure I am. That's why we are all here. Actually, Timmy, as you are still a minor, your father can sign in your name, so we didn't call you in yet, but as you wanted to see him, you can very well join in."

That stung a bit. But I don't think dad would go behind my back to hurt me.

"Sorry kid, but I still don't know, who you'll blab out the stuff to."

"But Centy is in on it?" I tried to look angry and disappointed.

"Sure, he's part of the team now."

"Told you, I owe you big time."

Steve poured us all iced tea and headed forth the discussion he had in mind: "We need to wrap Fist quickly, so we can focus on the big prize next. Vic, who'll be publishing our stories this weekend?"

"We can actually get an article in the New York Post, but it has to be something along the lines: Should LLW ban an ex-veteran from in-ring performance and get him psychological help?" Centy was proud, I didn't get it.

"Perfect. I'll write this one myself. We'll attack the State for not doing enough about the Vietnam veterans. But in the company of rough guys, we're actually trying to help him. Here's where he can find comradery of the platoon and we're hoping he'll make that bond, because we are convinced he's a good patriot who believes in the ideals US is fighting for.

They'll call us out on this, and we'll throw the Stark incident at them, how US is supporting peace in the middle east and how dangerous that is. How hard it is to be a good guy and how everybody's hitting on you."

"But aren't we putting dirt on our allies in the gulf?" Dad asked.

"I'll come to that later."

"And if they slander Fist? Should he react? I bet they'd want to come after us on that one and I cannot guarantee and easy passes from other editors." Centy was worried.

"The Howard Roark defence!" I've said.

“Bravo Timmy! That fits the character perfectly – be quiet, keep working, don’t care what others say and come on top because of his dedication and conviction. That’s the face turn for a badass! And TV, Vic?”

“That’s easy. That new black girl, Oprah, she’s running talk shows and I can get some time with her, if we present something along the lines of TV entertainment and upcoming shows.”

“You’re on the role, Vic. Timmy, will you be able to do that?” Steve asked.

“What do I have to do?”

“Present your concept for the Countdown show. It would help if you get somebody from the Miller family to go along. Max would be OK, but as we want new energy, Suzy should be along... showing the two of you kids, how you’re making TV programming schemes your generation is tapping into. Just don’t forget to talk about Fist every now and again – how such kind of matches are perfect for lone wolf, commandos, tough guys trying to prove themselves, because they feel a deep emotional hole for not finishing their job, for letting down their uniform and their country.”

“Can’t do that yet.” I’ve said.

“Right, Brogan has to ask Fist to enter, he’s not officially part of the match yet. Quick thinking. OK, then just stop at the emotional hole. Can you do that?”

“Got it!” I said, looking forward to being on TV together with Suzy.

“Vic, make sure he looks the part. Coach him on TV appearance. I’ll get Max on this as soon as you get a date at... what did you say the show was?”

“Oprahs.”

“Now all we got to do, is set up the Countdown script.” Dad said.

“We’ll do that latter. There’s another job I want to talk to you about – but strictly confidential. It’s about what you mentioned as well, Dan. Iraq and the Gulf.”

“I’m all ears.” Dad said. The rest felt the same.

“There’s a lot of money on the table, but we have to create an American hating fracture.” Steve said. “Something like the Russians were in the past.”

“Why can’t we use the Russians anymore?” Dad asked.

“Since Mikhail Gorbachev came to power, we are getting friendlier with the Russians, so we have to get along with the times too.”

“You want the Arabian world to be against US, don’t you Steve? That’s why the Gulf incident plays so well. Iraq against Iran, Iran being the bad guy, but our people died at the hands of the guys we’re supporting, the Iraqi. That’s a good reason to start hating somebody.”

“Right you are Dan. And basically, we are beginning this already, with Arabian Knights, but we need to push it way beyond.”

“How much money are we talking about here?” Vic asked.

“Quarter of a million for each of us.”

“How far beyond?” I asked.

“Beyond the arenas. We must put heat on this group of people.”

“An invasion angle?” Dad asked.

“What’s that?” Vic wanted to know.

“It’s when you get a stable that wants to run the whole show. Sand Gene can lead it and keep bringing Arabic heels in, going for any title – including women’s title.” Dad answered.

“Except, they don’t allow women to do such sports over there, right?” Vic kept asking.

“That’s why we’ll have a guy in one of those black suits, what are they called, to fight for the women’s title, making a huge statement when he gets it.”

“It’s Burka. That’s perfect. They take all the other titles first, then go for the women’s title and when a man dressed as a woman takes the title, he smashes it to bits, so there would be no more women wrestling – ultimate heel!” Steve concluded.

“Say hello, to the money!” Vic stated.

“Vic, you better go and start talking to the media – you’ll get the article for the Post and get us a date with Oprah. I’ll talk Max into that, so we can have between two and four guests, maybe if she wants we can send a wrestler too.”

“OK, I’m off. See you later kiddo, you know where my place is.”

“Sure thing, we’ll just wrap up with the Countdown.”

He was off, when dad asked me: “You’re hanging out with him?”

“I’m going to his place to check out the computer. We’ll have diner together.”

“Isn’t Jenny living with you now?” Dad asked.

“It’s complicated.”

“Do you guys need some time to catch up?” Steve asked. “I can go get us some sandwiches or something.”

“Thank you, Steve. Here’s twenty, get me and Timmy eggs and ham sandwiches. We’ll only need a moment and will start working on the Countdown before you’re right.”

“Take your time. I’m a dad too and can’t imagine what I’d do with a kid under so much pressure.” Steve said, tapping my shoulder.

“Dad?”

“Just ask. You know I’ll help you if I can.”

“Can I crash in with you for a while?”

“Why? What’s wrong with your place?”

“I want to get Smack out and I told her, I’m cancelling the rent.”

“Wait. You’re cancelling rent, because you want to dump your girl?”

“Yes, she came to my place, because she can’t be with her dad. If I had a smaller place, she can’t be with me anymore. And we separate.”

“No can do. I ain’t gonna help you turn into jellow. If you want, you can come right after you told her, but if you wanna dump her, tell her you’re dumping her! If you don’t know, if you want to dump her, let’s talk about your reasons. Maybe you change your mind and work out your trouble with her. But I’m not letting you hide in a hole avoiding your responsibility.”

“But dad... Didn’t you ever run from something?”

“Yes, I did. From bullets, from cops, from wild fathers with pitchforks, rabid dogs, more bullets... but never from myself.”

“What do you mean, dad?”

“Look, you can get Smack out of your place that way, but you’re working with her. You’ll be running into her and that’s why you need to resolve the issue, not run from it. And you know that! You’re smart enough. So, it’s not Smack you’re running away from, but yourself. Are you afraid of her? You want to be the good guy, who gave her back her freedom, while dumping her? This isn’t kayfabe, it’s reality. Whatever angle you want to do, won’t work. Reality catches up to you and the only way to go through life is to be true to yourself. No matter how sleazy your reasons are, they’re better than lies.”

He was right, I knew it: “I suppose.”

“Now let’s surprise Steve and have this thing ready before he comes. What did you have in mind?”

Steve gave us about half an hour to talk, before returning with sandwiches and root beer. We were half done by then, so we all sat down for lunch, when Steve started saying: “With Vic gone, I want you to know, 250 is just for starters. If we do a good job, our lab will get a deal for TV series and films. There’s about half a million per each episode in which we work the angle in. And we should try it in every popular show.”

“You mean, a full out hate on Arabia?”

“Yes, Dan. You know what that means, don’t you?”

“Hope not. Last time US was working something like this up, the cold war broke out, and even then, they were working off the hatred from between the wars.”

“Even worse. We might get involved in the middle east, so we must put dirt on them and make Americans ready to hate and fear the sand people of the Persian Gulf. They’re the new boogie man. I was thinking, I’ll celebrate, when the cold war is over... turns out, I’m preparing people for the next one.”

“Only, if you’re right, Steve, this time it will be the Asian theatre all over again.”

“Is that why we are tipping the public opinion on veterans?” I asked straight out.

“That’s the first step.” Steve said. “Sympathy and pride for our guys. Next, channel the hatred. Finally, if it works, scale it up, so it’s popping up on every media in any shape of form, but if possible, during feel good moments. That’s how you get to people’s subconsciousness.”

“And we get rich during the process?” I asked.

“Either we do, or somebody else does. There’s others who do this kind of things. We just get to show our results beforehand through the shows, so the people paying know what we will deliver. That makes us get bigger money. At the same time, it allows us, to sabotage what others may try. That makes us get even bigger money. That’s what Huey realized, when he set up the lab and made a deal with Max. That’s why he doesn’t mind spending money to cover for the shows if they flop. Shows cost less than he’s getting to do the dirt.”

“Where does the money come from?”

“That, son, is something you must never ask.” Dad said.

“Ad never try to find out.” Steve added. “If you’d find out, it could cause you your life.”

“So, cash, or?”

“Never cash. Always on the account. This isn’t some crime syndicate we’re talking about. These are all legitimate business deals and they all serve to boost the ratings, merchandise sales, popularity, ... Also, that way it can be easily traced.”

Somehow the Countdown script didn’t seem so important anymore. And neither did Smack.

Chapter VIII: Modernization

* *A very expensive typewriter*

“Let’s go over it again, and wrap it up! Each of the four ring corners is patted in a different colour, red, blue, black and white. And there’s a lottery, where each wrestler draws a number from the lot of one of the four colours. Two weeks before the show we have the draw, to determine the teams. Ones start of, tens are at the back. Brogan draws blue 9, with O’Toole having blue 10, Sand Gene has white 8, with white 9 and white 10 being the numbers of Muddy Masks, an unknown new tag team. Before closing the show, Brogan gets attacked by the tag champions Arabian Knights, under instructions of Sand Gene, because he won the Valentine’s battle royal and is the odds on favourite to win. Fist helps him, chases the baddies off, and Brogan asks Fist to take his place, because they broke his ribs during the attack. *I will avenge you, fellow patriot*, are the only words Fists utters. The show closes.

The night of the fight comes and we kick off with Buddy Sledge, Hairy Harry, Rufus Red and Smiling Jimmy. They fight one on one, until Buddy and Jimmy are on the ropes, so Harry and Rufus just run into them, knocking them out of the ring...

Yes, we had a scrip who enters when, throws who out, and Fist’s big win.

...Smack jumps the railing and enters the ring, hugging Fist and raising his hand, saying *I always knew you weren’t a monster*. Fist catches his breath, picks her on the shoulder, parades around the ring and they both leave the arena.”

“Damn it, Dan, that’s a wrap!”

“Yeah, we got the show dad, and we can work the hate angle on Arabians.”

“Good, because I’m all worn out now.”

He’s worn out? I still plan on seeing Centy tonight, to learn about computers. Somehow, I lately feel, I prefer things like reading, and learning new stuff to just going out there and hanging around. But we’ve made I deal I’ll bring pizza, so I best be off.

“Third floor, and the elevator’s out.” Centy told me over the intercom, after I’ve rang.

I made it up the stairs with two big pizzas in my hand, when a door on the third floor opened up, Centy waving for me to come in.

“Just put them on the table, I’ll get you a beer.”

I sat down behind the table where I put pizzas, and looked around. Nothing fancy... a small kitchenette behind the big room I walked into, where the TV was, with two doors in the back. I guess one was for the bathroom and the other for the bedroom. There was also a big window, with a view of this nice looking, old office building, with some trees in front and a bus stop where I got off just at the corner. I wish I had a place like this. In the corner by the window, there was an office desk with the computer.

“It’s a XT 286, with a 6 MHz processor with 640 KB RAM and a 20 MB hard disk.”

“By the way you’re bragging, I imagine that’s a good thing!” I laughed.

“Sure is, let me turn in up and show you what I’ve got!”

OK, I knew what a computer was, I’ve seen them around Max’s and Steve’s office, in fancier places I’ve checked in... but this is the first time, I’m actually behind one.

“Look, Bop’n’wrestler! You can fight 10 guys! Listen to this crazy tune.”

He started telling me about this wrestling computer game.

“So, you got a computer, to play wrestling games? Don’t you get enough wrestling for real?”

“You’re kidding, right. This is research I’m doing... well actually just reviewing it for the magazine. We’re having a coupon, and I get 15% from Mindscape, Inc., the publisher, of each game sold through the coupon. And it’s not just for this machine... it’s for Apple, Atari, Spectrum, Commodore, ”

This surprised me, so I shook my head.

“Nice, but I don’t get it. They’re giving out coupons, so the game is cheaper, and they’re paying you your share. How do they benefit?”

“They get their same share per each game disk. It’s less than what the game sells for, trust me. They pay more for advertising the game in stores and shipping, than they reduce the prize for the coupon and my share. So, they profit, while I directly get 15% for promoting the game, which increases their sales in stores. Plus, like I’ve said, there’s no costs in delivering, because people pay for postage.”

This day has turned into one huge extended lesson, and I haven’t started learning about the computer yet. “And what about this writing programme you were telling me?”

“Ah yes, WordPerfect!”

He opened a programme: “Wait, I’ll show you one of the articles, that’s going to print.”

He typed something in and the screen got blank, with a small green line bleeping.

He was pressing some more keys and the green text showed up saying *The ugly green is anything but suiting. We all know, the green in the park makes us feel good after a day in the office. But the green colour they use for the camouflage uniforms are anything but calming us down. They were specifically designed, to make people more aggressive and less empathic. Why? Simple. While our guys, who went into the jungle to fight, laid low hidden in the undergrowth, they should not be dulled into passivity, so they were kept agitated by the colour of their own uniform.*

“What kind of bullshit are you writing Vic?”

“The kind that of bullshit that will make ignorant readers feel our guys have always been pushed against their own will and beyond the limits of natural endurance – especially their psyche.”

“Right, and that way you’re making the public sympathetic.”

“You’ve got it kiddo! But watch this!” He pressed a few keys and half the screen disappeared. “See, I can just delete it from this sentence on, and write something completely different.”

“But it was good. Now you have to re-write the same thing again.”

“Nope.” He pressed a few more keys and the screen came back, all highlighted in green. “That’s what I was telling you. You can edit your heart out with this baby! And the best part is, you don’t need to put it on paper. I have it on my hard drive and I copy it to my floppy. Take the floppy to the editor of the newspaper and he just opens it up, reads it, uses it for printing... With your stories, you take the paper you had on your typewriter and have to retype it first. And you really should work on your spelling. But with this baby, it even checks to the words, to see if they’re correctly written.”

“Awesome! This really would help me. How much did it cost you?”

“Don’t worry about costs. We’ll get that quarter million deal and you’ll be able to afford it. Let’s sit down for pizza now.”

I was hungry, but kept looking at the computer. This really was a technological revolution and modernization. *And as the internet was nowhere in sight, yet, I had no idea just what this computer revolution will become in about a decade.*

“Mmm, peperoni. How did you know?”

I didn’t I just got one with peperoni and the other with salami.

“A computed guess.” I winked and grabbed a piece.

“Say, you got any plans for tonight?”

“Why?”

“A friend of mine plays the keyboards in a Pink Floyd tribute band and their in a club hereby, gonna play one of the new songs off the Roger Waters album. Wanna go?”

Pink Floyd? Wasn’t a bad offer, but I felt like something more upbeat. Still, with all the work and never really going out, these seemed like a perfect way for having a good time. Besides, I felt like soaking in some of the culture, instead of just being at wrestling events, pool halls I used to visit with dad, or having sex with various girls, which I’ve one quite a lot this year. From losing virginity to scoring with four different girls... I’d say it was the Chinese year of the pussy for me.

“Sure, sound’s cool!”

I still couldn’t get around a few things I was trying to work out in my head, so Centy realized this: “Something bothering you? You’re not still thinking about how much the computer costs?”

“Well, a bit... but I’m more confused what to do with the girl that lives with me.”

“Girl trouble?”

So, I opened up about me and Smack: “In a way. It’s Jenny, you know, Nik’s girl.”

“Right, the one you said I was peeping on.”

“Hey, you were spying on us from the fire escape.”

“True. What about her?”

“She moved in with me. You remember she had a falling out with her dad.”

“In the ring, that’s how she lost her baby. Must’ve been tough on her and her dad, to carry that burden around. They made up yet?”

“Nope. Didn’t go see him at the hospital and two days before he was released, she asked to move in with me, so she wouldn’t have to see him.”

“Damn, kiddo. That must be quite a load for you.”

“Yeah, speaking of loads...”

“Dawg, you didn’t?”

“I did. She did. We did... anyway, yeah, we fucked and I felt like I was in love... but next day I got so confused. She keeps Smacking me.”

“Ouch. Is that why you call her Smack?”

“Nah, that goes back to our school days... well, yea, she smacked me back then too, but basically, she wouldn’t take no smack from anybody.”

“And now she’s smacking you at your home. Why don’t you throw her out?”

“How can I? I let her in, to help her out. She cannot gt back to her dad. She hates him and he hates her. Also, I had a crush on her, like forever, and now I got to be with her, and we hit it

off, but she just makes me so angry. I know there's a sweet girl in there somewhere, but she's always so rough and pushes me around, while asking me to help her and trusting me."

Vic put his hand on mine, feeling my fingers: "You ain't married, are you? You sound like you were."

"I'm working on it. I told her, I'm moving out, so she'd move out too. Then each of us would find our own place."

"See, that's never a good policy, kiddo, because lies have this tendency to backfire on you."

"Look who's talking, Mr green uniform."

"Well, after looking at the green text on the screen, I started hating the colour. Don't tell anybody, that how I got the idea. But there's a huge difference. I'm writing stories for the people I don't know and they don't know me. Also, I'm not telling them what to do, just telling them what I think might be the reason that could explain facts. It's like kayfabe... you're telling them guys in the ring hate each other and beat each other up and they keep coming for more.

But this? You'd lie to a girl you've been to school with, who lives with you, and will keep on working with you to call your bullshit? Nah. That's something that really will backfire."

"But I am looking for a different place. I want to move out of that dump."

"Great, move. Find a better place. But explain to her, why she's not going with you. Don't blow her off by looking for excuses why she cannot be with you, hoping she'd understand the hint."

"Centy, you're the second guy telling me this today."

"Your dad knows stuff. Trust his judgement."

"How did you know?"

"It was either him or Steve, and why would you talk to Steve about it?"

"Let's go see the show."

"OK, and I know the bartender, so if you wanna get drunk, just pick your poison."

Even with the old law, of having to be 19 to drink in NY I still couldn't drink, so this was a great offer: "Thanks Vic."

"Oh, and the computer – the whole package you see, including the printer and WordPerfect – it cost \$5.000, but I can get you a discount, if you're willing to do a promo interview on how you use it to write great shows."

Ufff, that's expensive. Somehow this computer revolution doesn't seem so near. But hey' with the money Steve was talking about, this will be a snitch. "Thanks for sharing, now let's get drunk!"

**** *An uphill battle***

It was a bit different, I must admit. I used to remember Floyd's music like a dragged out front chin lock. You know, feels great, but they just don't get on with it, so there's no real action. I mean, kinda like the Doors. Great songs, but couldn't listen to the whole thing... why did they drag it out so long.

And this new thing, this was some dancing upbeat song about listening to the radio? I get it, it was Roger Waters on his own, not with the Floyd anymore, still, didn't feel right.

Were it not for the *Another Brick in the Wall*, I would have hated the whole evening, despite the cocktails Centy kept bringing me.

Again, don't get me wrong, he got me drinks, but I wasn't into the fancy colours, sweet tasting stuff you drink through a straw. I don't particularly like hard drinks, so I couldn't outlast Winston or Brogan, but I could take my share... and this didn't feel like it was it. *Also, and I didn't think of it at the time, probably because I was still confused between Smack and Suzy, who kept creeping in my mind all the time, there were no women at the club.*

So, my mood was serious, despite knowing, I had one too many teeth gluing, blue coloured coconut smelling drinks. Centy asked: "What are you thinking off?"

"Nothing much, I just don't get the songs."

"Not a Floyd fan?"

"Why glorify depression and personal pain?" I asked.

"I guess you never saw their movie, right? Wanna come? I have it on VHS."

"Yeah, let's blow this joint."

And we returned to Vic's place. It was getting late.

"Come on up. We can watch the movie."

"It's getting late. I'll be heading for home."

"Come on, kiddo, you can crash at my place tonight, if you're too sleepy to watch. It's a great movie." Vic kept insisting, but I just felt like hitting my own bed.

"Thanks, maybe some other time." I've said, looking around if there's a cab.

"Well, OK. But if you really cancel rent and need a place to stay for a while, I've got room to spare. Now, let me at least walk you someplace, where you can get a cab."

"All right. I gotta get some shut eye, we're pitching Countdown to Max tomorrow after lunch." And I was really happy it wasn't first thing in the morning, as I couldn't have gone anywhere tonight.

On the way, sitting in the back of the yellow taxi, waving off to Centy, I was thinking of what to do with Smack, when the driver asked me: "So, you didn't want to spend the night at your boyfriend?"

"I don't know what you're talking about." I replied and I was being honest about it. I mean, it's not like I didn't know about homosexuality, but the thought never entered my mind... until the driver planted it there. So that's why there were no women at the club. I guess I won't be taking Centy up on those sleep over offers anytime soon.

"All right." The driver said.

We drove in silence all the way, to my place, where Smack was outside waiting. When she saw me get out of the car, she came at me: "We gotta talk, pipsqueak, it ain't gonna take long. Just to get one thing strait, all right?"

"OK." I replied, paying the driver and leaving a big tip. "Let's go inside and talk." I was too tired to talk, but I guess something was up.

"If you plan on dumping me in this neighbourhood, because you're too scared to tell me something, forget it. You know who I was talking to today? Cedrick, he's Bill's son, you know Bill... the guy who owns this place. He came around, checking the lightning, so I asked him about you moving out. He told me, you've got a sweet deal here, you can stay for three more years at the same price. And he ain't heard about you cancelling."

“That’s because I wasn’t cancelling yet. I hate this dump, but haven’t any other place to go to yet. So, I was thinking of moving in with my dad for a while until I find something nicer.”

“But why were you thinking of moving in the first place?” Smack insisted.

“You’ve guessed it, to leave you in this dump. I wanted to run away from you.”

Smack – right across the face.

“Bastard! We go back a long way and we were friends and all, and now, that I slept with you, you finally got what you wanted and you’re throwing me out?”

That was what I was afraid off. She’d put the blame on me. Well, naturally, since I am making a move. But I didn’t care, whose fault it is. I just didn’t want anybody to point out at me. Especially not like this, so that people would think I abused her like a trophy and dumped her. Then again, I finally understood all the depths of what dad said that day, about becoming a slave to my cock. If you let your cock run your life, you’ll end up in situations like this.

And that just after being romanced by Centy... well, I at least guess that was it... oh, and the booze is kicking in. I know that, because I didn’t really feel that slap.

“No, I’m not throwing you out. I’m moving out and you can’t go with me. If you wanna stay here, that’s fine. I’ll talk to the owner and get the contract signed over to you under the same conditions I have. You’re getting paid for the shows, right?”

That felt like a good thing to say – I’d get out of it, but wouldn’t throw her on the street.

She was looking at me: “You’re drunk! You don’t know what you’re saying. I’m off to bed and you better take a shower and set the alarm, because I’ve got work to do in the morning.”

Mom died too young for me to know, but I guess this is how married couples react.

“Sure, we’ll talk about it tomorrow.”

“If you don’t run away with some floosy again. Don’t you think I can smell Sex on the beach from your mouth? Drinking cocktails, coming home drunk... I should throw YOU out!” She said, going into the bedroom, leaving the doors open just widely enough for me to see her take the clothes off.

She was doing it deliberately, teasing me to come into my bedroom. I just dropped on the couch. I’ll take a shower in the morning. The last thing I heard was Smack slamming the door shut, yelling: “Good night then!”

She was gone by the time I got up. My alarm was off. Did she do it on purpose, to get me in trouble, or did I forget to set it? Never mind, I still got time... and no hangover! Water, shower, more water, food... yeah, that sounds like a plan. By the time I was on the way to the office, I almost completely forgot about Centy’s possible pass, because I kept thinking what to do with Smack. But all of that disappeared, as soon as I walked through the door of Max’s office building, with half an hour to spare. Now, I was all business, all wrestling, and could explain the details of Countdown. I even figured out, how we can rig the number lottery, determining the teams and numbers.

“Sorry, Timmy, you’ll have to wait a while. Take a seat. The boss man hasn’t returned to the office from lunch yet.”

“Thank you, Dolores.” I gave her a nice smile and sat down.

“Can I get you a cup of coffee or something? I’ve a feeling lunch will take longer as usual.”

“Thanks, coffee would be great... and some ice-cold water.”

She went behind the wall, I guess that’s where the kitchenet was, and when she returned, she was all sweet and everything. “Here you are, Timmy.”

“Why, thank you Dolores. Something special going on today?”

She didn’t say, just rolled her eyes and sat down behind her desk. That made me uncomfortable. I was going over my notes, when dad and Steve came.

“They won’t be here any time soon.” I hear my father’s voice.

“So, Phil and Suzy are filling in for him?” Steve said.

What are they talking about? Max isn’t going to be here and Suzy will be in the meeting with some guy named Phil?

“Hello gentlemen.” Dolores greeted. “Young Sawyer is already waiting here and I was told to let you in the conference room as soon as you arrive.”

Not in Max’s office? This is getting stranger and stranger. But I was kinda happy to see Suzy again. Although it sounded weird.

We all got into the conference room, where this guy, I guess it was Phil, already waited, looking out the window. When he heard us come in, he turned around and extended his hand:

“Hello Steven, Daniel. And this must be Timothy. Susan will be with us in a moment.”

“Hi Philip. It’s been a while.” Steve answered.

Dad just came and gave him a pat on the shoulder: “Aren’t you on the west coast anymore?”

“Not since we’ve been bought out. Finally, I can start growing hair back on my head instead of pulling them out. We were really going downhill and this let me pay off some things. And now, I became your fall-back guy.”

“Impressive. Same deal you had with the Rockies?”

“Yup. I guess Max trusts me, Dan. No hard feelings?”

“Sure not. I wouldn’t want to be put on the spot like that.” Dad answered.

“Not you, Dan. I was asking Steven.”

“I’m not under a Miller contract, so it’s all last year’s snow to me.” Steve answered.

Obviously, this fall-back guy is a very important position. And if he’s here instead of Max, this means, he must be the new right-hand man. And he’ll be with Suzy, boss man’s daughter. Speaking of which, this nice smell I felt indicated, she’s walking through the still opened door.

“Hello gentlemen. Don’t be up on my account. Dolores, please, serve them their drinks.” She came in, sat down at the head of the table and smiled at all of us, waiting for us to take our seats.

“Everybody, I think you’ve all met Phil, as he was running a successful promotion that was pushed out of business before we acquired it, we’ve decided to bring him in and use his expertise. Apart from other things he will be doing, he will be involved in creative and has already prepared a proposition how the Valentine’s massacre should go down. He, however, took your suggestions to heart and changed the show. I’ll let him present it.”

She sure didn’t lose any time.

“Shouldn’t we wait for Max?” Phil asked.

“Nah, he won’t be back any time soon.” Dad giggled.

“Right, he gave me a message, that he’ll be running late.” Suzy confirmed.

“All right then. Let’s begin.

As decided, this will be a great pay-off to the whole New Year’s tour, so we can have great build-ups. And as said, we’ll use it for the tag team champions. But the main event is the battle royal built around Brogan.”

He kept on explaining and I guess it was all good, because neither dad nor Steve argued. But all I could think of was Suzy. She was there, with her soft legs in silky stockings showing at a perfect angle for me to see, from where I was sitting. They looked great, but a bit too short for her. I guess that's what kept me looking at them, at her. She noticed and gave me an angry look. I stared in her eyes and she broke eye contact first, laughing a bit.

I don't know how long we were staring up and down each other, but it must have been long, as dad started saying: "...and that brings up to a build up to Countdown."

This was my cue. That would explain, why dad was kicking me under the table. He must have picked up, how lost I was at the sight of Suzy.

"First, we start by publicly explaining the concept of Countdown. At the same time, we start explaining it in the studio, the magazines will publish articles about it. Most likely, we'll also be on TV in other shows, presenting a new kind of event nobody's ever saw before."

As I started talking, Suzy leaned forward, placing her rack on the table, showing cleavage directly towards me. She realized I saw it, when I broke in mid-sentence. She gave me a naughty, nasty, satisfied, seductive smirk.

"Khm... drawing balls with numbers, but actually having the ball with their number in the sleeve. As it's taped, we can even cut off and when a girl..." and this is where I improvised, "...and I'd suggest it's Suzy who does it, takes the ball out of wrestler's hand and places it in the right spot on the board, we can still stop the tape and replace it."

I kept on explaining about the Countdown, when the door opened and Max walks in, with a lady friend under his hand... well, lady would be an exaggeration. It was Hill. I was out of breath for the second time during the meeting.

"Khm, khm... and that's when he ducks and O'Toole is eliminated. Big finish and Smack comes down to the ring, telling him *I knew you weren't a monster!* Big hug, lifting her on the shoulder to for a show of leg and they walk behind the curtain."

Max started clapping: "Perfect. A happy ending with a face turn and sex appeal. That's what good TV shows need."

"Welcome back, Hillary." Suzy said, obviously irritated.

"Thank you sweetie. I see I've met all of you, except for..."

"Phil. I'm charmed."

"I'm convinced you are." Hill replied, then looked at me: "You're really happy to see me again, I notice. And I've only just walked in. My... your age is doing wonders for you."

It was only then I even noticed a massive boner I had. But it had nothing to do with Hill... must be all that staring I did at Suzy, who I looked at again. She smiled realizing what Hill meant.

"Gentlemen, as you all know Hillary, I just want to let you all know, she's back on board. She'll be an escort to the Arabian Knights. Think of princess Scheherazade, telling the story."

"Yeah, I just need to put on a bit more tan. Who'd wanna join me out in the sun, while I'm working on my character?"

"So that's a wrap!" Max said. "Wait for me in my office, puss."

Hill purred her way out of the meeting room and Max turned towards us.

"I won't be at the office for a while, so don't be surprised if you see me with more tan too, when we meet next time. But I should be back around thanksgiving. While I'm gone, Phil is in charge, with Suzy as the understudy. I'm counting on two of you, Steve and Dan, no be

supportive and that everything runs smoothly. If there's a real emergency, do call me. Stacy will have the number, as she's running my desk. Don't pester other girls out there with it."

He walked off, light on his feet and that was it.

"I guess we're done here." Steve said. "If you don't mind, I have to finish my article for the Post to give Centy."

"Good luck. I'm shooting and doing comments tomorrow, so I guess I'll see you next week." Then dad turned to Phil: "Wanna go for a beer, so we can catch up on old times?"

"I thought you'd never ask."

"Wanna join us, Tim?" Dad asked.

"Sorry, got some loose end to tie." I said, and they were both off. That left Suzy and me alone in the room.

"Why, Timothy, you must've had some hard time?" She said, with a low, seducing voice. I leaned back, on the window, revealing my condition did not change since everybody left.

"Does your little climber want to conquer a Hill?" She asked, with just a touch of disgust in her voice.

"Done that, explored all the caverns..."

Her eyes opened wide with a mixture of emotion well covered by biting lower lip slightly, twitching barely noticeable with her sweet nose, while raising her breasts taking a deep breath.

"How was she? Is she that good? Oh, why am I asking you. How would a kid like you even know?"

I sat down, looking her straight in the eyes, while she was leaning with her two balloons were about to inflate in my face like an airbag, never breaking eye contact.

"My dear lady, don't judge me by your lack of experience."

"Is that a challenge?" She asked, while pulling her right foot out of her high heel shoe and placing it on my chair, right under the crotch.

That was it. I got up, rubbing my balls over her leg, grabbing her around the hips, placing my lips on her. She lowered her leg, with her hand running down my back towards my zipper, opening it and grabbing through it towards my cock, kneading its head through the boxers, with her delicate fingers. I was about to explode, so I picked her up, sat her on the table, and buried my head in her cleavage, while she was taking off her jacket and vest and me snapping the bra open. She leaned back and I grabbed her breasts, while my mouth was making its way down her stomach towards her lap. She spread the legs, revealing already wet panties I didn't even take off, just slid aside and started licking away. She moaned and started twitching. I was too hard and close for comfort, so I grabbed her by the neck and started kissing her.

"Don't play with me, boy. I want you to fuck me like a man!" She demanded and slid herself on me. I started thrusting inside her and finally sat down, with her riding me, her huge boobs hypnotising me, so I had to grab them again, licking the nipples like they were quickly melting strawberry ice-cream. She started shivering with orgasm so strong, the pressure of her squirt pushed my dick out just as I was ready to bust a nut, so we were getting each other wet, twitching with orgasmic spasms and she leaned on me saying: "I want more!"

I placed her on the table, boobs first, and took her from behind, ploughing through her like a heavy duty John Deer... no make that John Stag machine that just wouldn't stop. She was letting out cries of pleasure until finally she said: "You're crazy. I can't take it no more." But I kept on pounding her soft butt with my stomach, with my balls tickling her clit when I went in

ball deep just waiting in there for a while. She was making a turn, so she'd be on her back, with her ankles around my neck. "You're gonna split me open!" And she put her feet on my chest and gently pushed me off, my dick jumping up, spraying her juices that were on it all over the place. "But I can't leave you like this." She said, dropping to her knees, gobbling it all down her throat and licking my balls. I came so hard, I dropped on my knees, unable to stay on my feet, with cum blasting all over her tits for half a minute, while she hugged and French kissed me. While we were lying on the floor like that, she said: "We have to do this more often!"

I was just running my hand through her hair, thinking what I'd like to do next time, when we heard the same kind of moans we were producing just a few moments ago.

"That slut. I can't believe dad's fallen for Hillary." Suzy said and her anger returned.

"I know, I was as shocked, when I found out my dad was with her too."

She started laughing, hugging me again. "Honestly? Is there no man in the company, she hasn't been with?"

"Swear to god. He told me himself, when he found out I was banging her."

She was lighting a cigarette and gave me a serious look: "Be honest with me now, am I as good as she is?"

"Honestly? She's great at extracting cum and giving guys... or at least a young guy like me the thrill of a life time. But it just felt, like she's a machine... like it's all a masturbation, but another person is doing it... I felt like a cow sent to be milked.

But with you, Suzy, you're passionate, soft and sweet smelling, and want to give it and take it... it's like this great act of joining two bodies in a glorious moment of bliss."

"Thank you, Timmy." She said, while staring to get up, trying to dress, realizing everything is covered with our combined pleasure moist.

"I'll ask Dolores to get me some fresh clothes. Want her to bring you anything?"

I was looking down at myself, but found no stain on me: "I'm good, thanks."

"That you are. Say, I'm free over the weekend. Why don't you come over to teach me the ins and outs of the wrestling business?"

"I'd love to."

"Dolores? Can I ask you a huge favour? Please get me my spare dress. I've spilled this one."

When Dolores finally showed up, with herbal tea and a woman's dress, she said laughingly: "Should I send the old one to the cleaners and have Mr Sawyer pick up the bill?"

I blushed.

"Don't worry, I've seen much worse in this building. Welcome aboard, miss Suzy."

Seen, I was thinking to myself. The way she was built I knew it wasn't just for looking. And with all the testosterone coming in and out of this place... I bet guys were doing things to her, I'll be doing to Suzy this weekend.

"Yeah." Suzy said, when Dolores left. "Dad banged her... and Stacy, and Doris, and Eve... I don't mind. They're nice girls, doing their job and earning extra on the side. It's that bitch my father's in right now I can't stand. Ever since mom died, she was trying to muscle in, one deal at the time, to get in line for the company. She's a real gold digger who wants to marry dad, to take over the company."

"And a bat-shit crazy nympho to boot." I added.

"Look, Tim, sorry about the other day. I really thought you were out to sabotage my Valentine's idea. But you turned out great. You're a good guy, a real babyface."

“I guess. I figured your idea was great, but I thought you were stealing my show. I got a job, to push Fist, to get him over. And just when I thought I had everything figured out, you show up. Bosses daughter, trying to change my story. I was furious and scared, but realized we don’t have to be against each other. We can join forces and make both shows work.”

“I love it, when we join...” She said, started fiddling around my crotch again. “You think you’re up for one last round?”

I kissed her, hugged her and said: “I believe you wore me out.”

“You’re not getting off that easy.” She said, and pulled my pants down, making me rock hard inside her mouth again. “Now I’ll show you, what it’s like to get milked.” She said.

It was my bad to have told her about Hill. I guess Suzy wanted to make her mark on the territory, claiming me for herself that way. I was just happy I didn’t tell her how many times Hill made me come, because right now and with the intensity I felt for Suzy, I’d sooner have a heart attack. She rode me to another load, saying: “That one was for the road, so you’ll last until the weekend.”

“Got it, lust, weekend.”

“You naughty boy.” And she kissed me on my shrivelled up weewee.

I was all on cloud number nine thinking about Suzy, when all of the sudden, I realized, I’ll face Smack. This might be unpleasant. As it was dark already, I walked quietly and found the door was unlocked. Opening it without squeaking, I heard moans from the bedroom. There was Smack, riding hard on Bass, who was hung like a rhino! Damn, I didn’t feel bad about Smack being with another guy, this was my ticket out. And I really was impressed by the equipment Bass was carrying. Must be the steroids. He’s been building up on muscle mass. Many guys were doing that. Guess that was a side effect. This made we think I should maybe work out more again and try some.

Anyway, I got some left over pizza from the fridge, sat down in the dark, waiting for them to finish and notice me. I wasn’t about to ruin their fun, when all of a sudden I heard Smack’s voice: “Is that you peepsqueak? Wanna join us? I’ve my ass and mouth still free so you get a choice of hole you want to jizz in.”

Bass laughed out loud at that, I guess they were both high and just said: “Sorry, Legs, but today, I don’t have any fucks left to give.”

Bass laughed again: “That’s my boy. Got some action of his own! AAAAHHHH!”

Smack grabbed him by the balls: “Don’t just laugh and talk to your buddy. It’s your turn to fuck. You’ve been lying there like a lug for half an hour me doing all the bouncing!”

So, he grabbed her by the neck, pushed her with the back to the wall, lifting one leg first, then the other, impaling her saying: “I ain’t your Dick. Don’t play with me. I fuck how I like.”

A week ago, I would find this arousing and would be dying for a chance to be invited to join. Three days ago, this would break my heart, finding Smack in bed with another. Today, I just felt relieved, although I had a feeling she was trying to get revenge on me this way.

I got on the couch and fell asleep.

***** *Make your move***

I woke up when the sun hit my face. I forgot to pull the shades down in the evening. It was still early. I heard Bass snoring in the other room. I was used to it, we were roommates for a while. The I heard Smack's whistling sound she did while sleeping hard. I knew both sounds really well, but wasn't used to hearing them together, so that got me thinking.

I was horny for Smack ever since I was in school and heard guys talking how good of a blowjob she can do. Put that horniness together with a sense of friendship, and it's easy to think you're in love. Next, I started feeling sorry for her, because of what happened that night in the ring and when she asked me to help her career, saying she trusted me and believed in me, I felt like a white knight saving a damsel in distress, to live happily ever after. But when she didn't act like a fairy princess, my bubble burst, so I wanted to run away, looking for excuses. Now, I guess we moved on to the next phase and it's all a matter of me talking to her, explaining the situation – and after all, I've already promised her, she can keep this place under my contract. But as we will be seeing each other a lot, working together, we should chase the white elephant out of the room. I'll talk to her, when she wakes up.

Then there was Hill. I was so stricken by Suzy, I didn't even think about Hill yesterday. Besides, she was with Max. So, she's out of my hair. But when our paths cross, I'll have to straighten things out with her too.

And then there was Suzy... sweet, soft, smelling like a dream... Thank god weekend starts tomorrow. I better take a cold shower now... haven't showered last night, again, and I still smell Suzy on me. And I don't just mean her perfume.

While cold water was calming me down and waking me up, I decided. I'll move out. I'll arrange the contract to be signed over to Smack and move out. I'm sure dad will let me crash with him, and even Centy offered me to crash at his place, but that was kinda suspicious. And I bet I'll find a nice enough place soon enough. Yeah, that's what I'll do.

"What did you do? Did you use up all the hot water, pipsqueak?"

Smack walked in and sat on the toilet.

"Don't mind me, just can't keep it in after the show tonight. Bass learned many new tricks since the last time."

She was doing him before? How come that doesn't surprise me as much as it would a week ago. "Nah, just felt like a cold shower."

She snarled a smile: "I invited you to join us last night."

"Look, Smack, can we sit down in a few minutes. I wanna talk to you."

"Sure, first one out puts the coffee on."

I closed the water and started drying myself with a towel, when I hear her dropping chunks in water. That was the time I knew I gotta get out.

"Can't handle my shit, kid?" She laughed.

How could I ever forget she was nothing but a good looking vulgar bitch, trying to be tougher than any bad ass guy at school?

I was sitting behind a table, with a full mug in my hand, when she came in. "Let me guess, you wanna talk about me and Bass and last night."

"Nope. I'm happy for you. You two seemed to have enjoyed yourselves."

"Yeah, Bass has grown into a real man. I was thinking of moving in with him, after what you said. But his place really is small."

“You think he’d switch? The two of you here, and me at his place until I find what I was looking for?”

“You’d do that?” Smack seemed pleasantly surprised.

“Hey, we’re a team. Me having sex with you was a mistake. You and I are not on the same level. You’re the talent and I’m the nerd writing stories. You should be seen on television and on covers of magazines, and I should be writing the reports in Max’s office. We can work great together, but shouldn’t mix our work too much with our personal lives.”

“Like, maybe an occasional match, but not a whole programme and definitely not a tag team.” She concluded. “I agree.”

Then she grabbed me by the neck, pulled me closer and kissed me on the forehead. “See, I can smack you a nice wet one too, that won’t hurt.” She smiled.

That worked out just fine! Now let’s just wait for Bass to wake up and tell him.

“So, how’s working with Mitch?” I’ve asked her.

“Mitch is just awesome. You know, there were only three of us, girls, in LLW that could have real matches. Now they brought a dozen more, plus many others that are just eye candy. All together, we got almost 30 girls, who can get in the ring and about 8 of us can really fight! With another 8 looking like good mid carders. I think they’ll really put up a women’s division. But they don’t plan any big matches just yet. So I guess I’ll drop out of the public eye, with that Suzy budging in as the nurse.”

“Don’t worry about that. Mid-march Fist will have his face turn and you’ll be in it, picking up where you’ve left.”

“And Suzy?”

“You’ll both be there, but as Fist will start tagging with Brogan, Suzy will hang with him and you with Fist.”

“Too bad it can’t be the other way around. Will I get to beat her up?”

“Don’t think she’s ready to take any bumps. She’s way too soft for that.”

She punched me in the shoulder: “So that’s why you weren’t up for action last night, dawg. You got some yourself. Good for you! Maybe you’re not such a nerd I figured you to be.”

We didn’t hear Bass get up, so we both got a bit scared when he said: “You should have seen him with the sisters. Got any more coffee?”

That worked out just fine. Bass and Smack decided to take me up on the offer, sharing the rent for this place and I’ll start looking for a place of my own. Things were looking up for me, so much so, I got scared... *I would say paranoia, but I wasn’t sure yet, what the word meant.*

Something told me, I should call the office. I went for the phone and saw it was off the hook. Guess the lovers didn’t want to be disturbed last night.

As soon as I placed the ear piece on, it started ringing.

“Hello?”

“Timmy, I’ve been trying to get you all morning. You better come down to the office. It’s Ducky.”

What now?

“I’ll get there as soon as I can, Stacy.”

Man, it’s times like this I wish I owned a car. But then again, I’m not even 18 yet, so dad had to sign for me renting my own place. Man, some laws just suck so much. Can’t wait for my birthday!

It took me quite a while to get there and Stacy just showed me to go into the conference room. There was quite a crowd there and I heard Max telling Ducky: “If you don’t have enough leverage to call this off, I’ll pull the plug.”

“Max, you gotta understand, how important that is. If they come after you with the antitrust laws, it doesn’t matter that we’ll beat them at court. By that time the damage will already be done.”

“Where’s all the lawyer suits when I need them.”

Max was beside himself, with Ducky just as nervous, Steve seemed calm as always, dad wasn’t there yet. I was Mitch and Phil was already there, but no Hill, which was a bit of a release. Unfortunately, Suzy wasn’t there either. There were two guys in sunglasses in the back, looking over some papers.

Three guys in suits walked in. “Hello Mr Rockshield, Mr Miller.” They walked straight for the two guys with sunglasses and I saw them exchange a few papers, then started talking.

“Don’t worry Ducky, between yours and mine team, we’ll figure out a solution.”

Suzy walked in, no makeup, no sweet smell, hair just up in a ponytail, with legs showing and no bra. Puff, I forgot about anything else. Oh, I guess we’re still waiting for dad to come.

“Whenever you guys are ready.” Max said to the people in the back.

“Right.” One of the suits said.

“As you have heard, some people started accusing us of doing unfair business. They say that now, that we’re the biggest wrestling promotion, we’ll use this monopoly to bully the television stations, and especially cable television for broadcasting wrestling pay-per-view shows. We have really good chances of winning, if this ever gets to the court, but we’d get a lot of negative media and every time they’d want to force us to accept their terms, they could threaten us with another law suit – because it will cost us more in lowered rating, than to accept their blackmail. We have a solution, though. Mr Miller, you should spin out! Your old company – the LLW – keeps being a wrestling promotion. But you establish a new company, and the spin off should handle your TV deals, marketing and everything. If you do it all yourself, you will face backlash. And as soon as this spin off is registered, you sell it off.”

Ducky seemed very pleased. Steve was doing some hard thinking in his head.

“Who do I sell it to?”

“Somebody you can trust. Somebody you know, will not stab you in the back.” The guy looked at Suzy.

“Where do I get the money for it? If I buy with my daddy’s money, there’s sure to be problems. And I don’t have that much of my own.”

Now Ducky stood up: “You can get a load from my investment fund. I’m one of the biggest business angles in the US, so it’s all legitimate.”

“No go.” Steve jumped in. “If I remember correctly, she is still a minor.”

The guys in suits put their heads together, then one of them said: “She can get emancipated.”

There was a moment of silence in the room.

“That way, she can be freed from control of her parents. There are three ways this can be done: enlist, get married, get a court order from a judge.”

“Don’t go for the court order.” Steve said.

“Why not?” Max asked and we all turned towards Steve.

“It will seem premeditated. Your daughter gets emancipated, so you can sign a company off to her? It’s too obvious. People will start asking questions.”

“Well, I’m not sending her to serve in the army!”

Suzy looked at me, just as the door opened and dad stepped in: “I’m sorry, what did I miss?”

“I guess I’m getting married!” I told him, Suzy’s smile just spread from ear to ear.

“Come on Tim, you’ve got to be more romantic than that, asking for my hand!” Suzy teased me from across the room.

Everybody burst out laughing.

“They’re right.” Steve said. “If Suzy got married, people wouldn’t question love as a motive. And those who would, will be the heels in the face of the public, so the popular opinion would be on our side. Guys, is it possible for Mr Miller to give the new spin off to his daughter as a wedding present?”

They put their heads together again, but I didn’t care anymore... I just came up to Suzy, picked her up to kiss her and asked her in front of everybody: “Will you marry me?”

She kissed me and said: “Let me down, you lummo.” I thought she won’t answer me in front of all the people, but she just said: “I’ve gotta check my planner, to set the wedding date! Me and Timmy are getting hitched!”

Chapter IX: When trees blend into a forest

** PI's blessings*

Everybody applauded, but none were really at ease about it.

"I guess, one of these days, I'll have to welcome you to the family." Max said, trying to come off as funny. You could see there were loads of worries on his mind.

Steve finally broke the silence: "I guess, gentlemen, we best leave and let the families get to know each other better." And he headed for the door.

One by one people were leaving the conference room, only Mitch giving his hand to Suzy saying: "I wish you all the best, princess."

"Thanks, uncle Mitch." She gave him a hug.

Uncle? I guess there are many more things I have to find out.

Finally, the four of us – Max and dad, Suzy and me – were left alone. Dad spoke first.

"Look, Max, kids, I... I mean congratulations and all, but..." He was at a loss for words.

"Suzy, how can you be sure about this?" Max asked. I realized I better keep quiet.

Suzy was taking her time, collecting her thoughts, then finally said:

"Daddy, this is my chance to help out the business. Sure, you were thinking of splitting up into a men's division and women's division being two promotions, with uncle Mitch running the other one. But that wouldn't be enough. Not with all the people aiming at us, to bring us down. Especially now, when the PPV business model proved successful and other industries are trying to get its share. The Super Bowl, Stanley's Cup, and all four boxing sanctioning organizations joining together for this one."

I felt a little bit hurt, although I probably should have expected this. From eyeing each other, to having sex, to getting married... it all seemed natural – but not in a span of three days!

"So, you've decided to marry Tim, to help me keep my business?"

Suzy looked at me, when Max was asking that, stood up and came around, to hug me from behind, while I was still seated in my chair.

"No, I chose Tim because I love him. I've had my eye out on him for a while, when I was attending the shows. He never even noticed me. He was watching the crowd, and could spot Steve's lab rats a mile away, so I thought all the stories Hill was telling me were made up. I thought he was gay. But he proved to me he was anything but.

I'm helping the business by rushing this thing through. Otherwise we'd both go to college, date, and get married in a couple of years."

She squeezed my neck tightly, rubbing her soft cheek up to mine.

Dad and Max looked at each other.

"What to do next?" Dad asked. "I think we'll need a lawyer. Will you call Edmund, Max?"

"You don't want your own lawyer on this?"

"I suggest we do this together, and Edmund can draft all the papers we need to sign. From what I know, you, me and Greta have to sign, as our children's respective guardians."

Max looked at dad, then looked at me and Suzy, then finally buzzed Dolores: "Get Edmund Dupree to my office ASAP, and try to get a hold of my wife. Our little girl is getting married."

Suzy swung around and sat in my lap, started kissing me, but my dad coughed... she stopped and just sat on the chair next to me... me grabbing her thigh under the table.

“Now people, I don’t mean anything bad by it, but I don’t want any dirt hanging over my head. It’s not that I don’t trust you, but I’ll also get my private investigators to look into the matters. If there’s anything that could do us harm, I want to know about it in advance, so we can be prepared for it.”

“Fair enough, Max. We don’t want any more scandals between us.”

Suzy was pulling my hand towards her panties, so I was sure she wasn’t listening, but I caught up on this, decided to ask dad about it later. Scandals between dad and Max?

“Also, we’ll prepare a pre-marital contract. Timmy, you might be a good kid, but I’m not letting you in on half of our wealth, just because circumstances suggest it’s best you marry into the family.”

Dad answered instead of my, as I was realizing Suzy’s panties were getting wet again.

“Understood. I’d do the same if I were in your shoes. Edmund can do that too. I trust you Max, to protect your family, without hurting mine.”

“That settles it. Kids, you want to be here for all the details, or would you rather go out have some fun?” Max asked.

“Can I burrow your limo dad?” Suzy said with a trembling voice of a woman, who’s about to let her passion get the best of her.

“Just tell Sam to have it cleaned up after you’re done.” Max said laughingly.

Off we were, to have some fancy sex in a limousine, while our fathers would set out marriage agreements and start planning out our lives. On the way out, I just heard Max say: “They best go to the same college, Suzy’s goin...”

She was pulling me to the elevator, where the action already started.

The day was passionate and nice and I felt like a million bucks. Still, I was feeling rather ashamed, when Suzy was dropping me off at my place.

“I’m planning to move out, you know. It was just a rental, because dad and I felt I should start living on my own, when I started working for the company.”

“Don’t worry. You can always come live with me, hubby, I’ve plenty of room to take you in.” She was motioning with the hips and licking her lips.

I French kissed her good night saying: “Thank you for feeling me welcome and letting me come whenever I want, Suzy.” Then I got out of the limo.

She waved goodbye and Sam drove off. I felt intoxicated, although we haven’t had one sip. I guess that must be love then. Turning around, I saw dad sitting out in front of my place.

“Sorry to budge in, Timmy, but we really need to talk about all of this. And you might want to consider buying a pager. You’re impossible to get a hold to. They told me you wouldn’t answer for half an hour this morning.”

“All right, but please, let’s sit somewhere to eat. I’m starving and worn out!”

“Walk with me, your place seems too crowded for talking.” Dad said laughing.

When we sat down, waiting for our burgers to be ready, dad straight out told me:

“Are you sure, you are ready to marry?”

“Hell no! But, I’m nuts over Suzy, a rich kid is a real catch, bosses daughter would have me set in the industry... and it all feels good! Like everything was leading up to this.”

“Glad to hear it. I was afraid you’d be crazy in love, only to change your mind three months later.”

“Hell no! Dad, something like this can have me set! I’m not after her money, but I’m sure Max won’t fire his son in law. And with the way things are going right now, I’m on a roll and must use it.”

“Good! But let me tell you the whole thing. I guess, you’re old enough to know. I was thinking of telling you for your 21st birthday, but you’re skipping ahead of time, so here goes.”

Oh-oh, such intros meant I ain’t gonna really like it.

“I don’t know how much do you remember your mother...”

This made me choke. I coughed a bit and just put my head down.

“She was something else. We met while I was out still wrestling. At first, I figured she was a ring rat, but then I noticed she only had eyes for me, when I was wrestling. So, we hooked up. It was nice and sweet. Two of us, having fun, dreaming dreams of me becoming a rich man in the business and we’d get our own house with a white picket fence, a golden retriever, and have four kids, two boys and two girls. Those were nice and innocent days. I was helping out at the warehouse and wrestling, and she was helping out at the tailor’s. We were saving money, but it didn’t amount to much. One thing led to another and then she realized, she wasn’t getting her period. I never cared much for church. Don’t get me wrong, I don’t mind Jesus... it’s just that I get really irritated when his fans come around, always telling me to believe this, do that... and all because it says so in the bible... but when they read that part out, I always got to understand something else.

Anyway, she was afraid to get a church wedding. She was afraid what the pasture would say about her having sex before she got married, so we decided to go to a court of law. It was also a lot cheaper. Unfortunately, as you were born, the business was in a decline, so my promotor couldn’t pay me regularly or enough to support both of you. We were roughing it, but then decided something needs to be done. I put on the uniform.

I was always thinking of how I’ll stay alive, so I’d come back to see you. How the army will take care of the two of you, if something happened to me. I never thought who’ll take care of Betty while I was away! Turned out, it didn’t take long before somebody would.

Now let’s get this straight! I don’t blame her and I don’t blame him. Things just happen, when people are separated. I’m sure if I stayed home, it would have been different. We would probably fight and we’d never have any money, so we’d probably split up anyway... I’d be paying alimony and she’d end up with Mitch – but she’d still be alive!”

“Mitch? You mean...”

“Yes, that Mitch. He was visiting Norton, he was the promoter, to see what talent he could get for Max’s dad promotion.”

“So, Mitch and Max aren’t brothers? Suzy called him uncle today.”

“They’re brothers in law. Mitch is Greta’s brother, that’s how Greta and Max met, when Mitch came wrestling for the Millers’. Anyway, Betty was also at Nort’s, asking for a loan, as the money I sent from the barrack still didn’t arrive and she had to pay rent. Mitch offered to help. He didn’t think anything else at the time, just saw a nice young lady with a cute little baby boy... both being in trouble, so he wanted to be generous. I guess that’s why I can’t blame him for anything. He really is a good guy. Unfortunately, I was going to be away for a long time, Betty needed help and Mitch was available, supportive and sweet. They fell in love.

I didn't know any of this at the time, as I was in Nam and every now and again got me a girl for cheap money, to ease my tension. The fact that we were all doing it, doesn't mean I wasn't aware I was cheating on my wife, so I had no reason to blame her for doing the same to me. I was just thinking we could put all the time while we're apart behind us, when I get back home.

But, like I've said. She was brought up religiously. She was too scared to be married in church, because she had premarital sex. She was completely out of her mind, to find out her husband would come home from war finding out, she committed adultery while he was away. The fact I wrote to her, telling her I love her and nothing else mattered but for us to be a family again, just contributed to her tension. In her mind, we couldn't be a family. She wrote to me: *For what I've done, you have all the right to kill me, or at least beat me like a bitch and throw me out of your house. That is your privilege, that is your duty, for you are a man of the house and must make sure our son is brought up the right way.*

Unfortunately, she wouldn't even wait to see me. When I called her from the state side hospital, that I was in US and was coming home, she hung up... and hung herself. Mitch was telling me about it, because he was the one who found her, and you. He came around to visit Betty at half past three, so it couldn't have been more than an hour after my call.

You were in the kitchen, eating some cookies from the box you threw to the floor, and she... she was in the bathroom...

Hanging from the hot water pipe... (sigh)

Pregnant...

With Mitch... (sigh)

Not breathing, and with no pulse."

Dad just buried his head in his arms, weeping his eyes out. Me sitting there, staring blankly at him, with tears down my face, not able to control myself.

"He took care of you, for two days, until I arrived and told me everything. I couldn't hold it against him. How could I, he probably saved you in more ways than one... We all lost her, but Mitch also lost his unborn child, she took along with her.

What daemons were forcing her to do this, I don't know. I just know that I busted the nose of her pasture at the funeral, when he started saying about the sin of suicide. Were it not for all of his sin talk, she would still be alive!"

We grabbed hands, crying for a while.

The guy at the bar had our burgers ready a long time ago, but knew better than to interrupt. My dad just waved at him, to bring them. He brought three shots with him saying: "On the house!" And drank one down, leaving the other two for us.

"To Betty... your mother. May the daemons never find her again."

"To mom."

We were sitting quietly, eating slowly, although I've lost my appetite, when dad spoke again:

"Mitch and I were completely heartbroken. He was even worse off. I had you, you were the light of my life and a worry that dragged me out of the depths of depression. But he... he started drinking hard and doing drugs... until Greta and Max got married and Greta asked Max to send him to an institution. He went quietly and spent almost two years there.

By that time, you and I already got settled down in the cheaper neighbourhoods of New York and I kept changing jobs, trying to make it through with earning money and bringing you up. Mitch helped. He sent me a check, said he was feeling guilty about it, Betty being married

and all, when it all happened. Also, he said that as he found you, when he realized he lost his unborn child, he felt you were something like a godson to him and if I ever baptise you, he'd like to do the honours.

I kept asking him, for a possible job in the wrestling industry. He kept saying I could come down and start doing the matches... but it wasn't until Max got settled down as the new boss of the company, that Mitch got him to offer me a contract. Not just a guarantee of a few bucks for a match, but a stable contract, meaning I'd get a steady check each week. Modest at first, but stable, with an option for the sum to grow, if they're satisfied with my job. The rest you know, because you were a part of it."

"So that's why Mitch was always keeping an eye on me."

"Yes. Max can be tricky and is capable of stabbing people in the back. Business is business, but Max is a straight forward guy with a heart the size of a hot air balloon! He always thought of you as family."

"That explains all the breaks I've been getting."

"Look, you were good, otherwise you couldn't pull it off. But without such a push, a kid like you could never have it made. When you told me, how you feel about Suzy and that you basically understand how important it is to be near the fire to get warm, I figured you're ready to know the whole truth.

Still, make sure you don't screw up with her. We're drafting up a very complex pre-marital agreement, making sure you don't cause any harm to the Miller family... That's why Max is also doing a background check on you. His PI will try to dig up all the dirt on you... Also, in case you divorce, you don't get anything off it, except what you brought into the marriage. Apart from your contract with Ducky's lab, it's all not worth enough to help you through the month. So, I'm asking you again – are you sure, you are ready to marry Suzy?"

"Yes sir. I'm sure and I'll do my best job to make us a family."

"That's my man!"

He stood up and gave me his hand for a first handshake of my manhood.

**** *A Dick is a dick***

After the most emotional time I've ever spent with my dad, I just felt like going to bed. But when we both came to my place, there was yelling and screaming, things were breaking and there appeared to be a real mess inside. Neighbours were out on the street watching, or on the hallway, nobody daring to see what's happening. I recognised three voices: Smack, Bass and Dick! Something started slamming hard against the closed door – from the inside – and the door cracked. There was Bass, falling flat on the back, with Dick choking him yelling: "You never touch any of my stuff!"

Me and dad rushed in, grabbed Dick and pulled him off Bass, while he was kicking and trying to fight us off. He already freed the arm I was holding and turned to scratch my dad's eyes out, when Smack, all bloody in the face, came through the door and stabbed Dick with a kitchen knife. By the way she swung, I guess she got him in the kidney or something, because he fell down in pain. The people in the hallway just quietly disappeared, while I ran for the phone to call the cops. This was going to be a long night still!

The ambulance arrived first, Bill the landlord second, and police showed up at a distant third. Needless to say, Bill threw me out, cancelling my contract – but making me pay for the damages. I'll get the bill for it.

Dick was taken to a hospital. He got stabbed bad, but was not in life danger. The rest of us, Me, dad, Smack and Bass were taken to the station. Two cops stayed at my place, just to check everything out.

As I was a minor, dad explained how we were out having diner and came back to a fight between the other three people. That got me off the hook, as the place was to my name, with dad co-signing.

Lucky for me, Bass confessed to everything. Possibly protecting Smack along the way.

“Dick was looking for me. He couldn't find me at my place, but they told me where I was. It was no secret I was seeing Smack. She's kid's roommate ever since she moved out from her dad's place.

Dick and Smack used to be an item, so when he saw us together, he got all wild and we had a fight. First he gave a headbutt to Smack and she started bleeding. I wasn't going to stand for it, so I jumped him. I don't know how long we were fighting, when he started choking me and rammed me into the door. I guess I was knocked out for a while, because the next thing I remember, Dan was standing over me, Smack sitting all shook up by the wall and Dick bleeding on the floor. Timmy here was on the phone calling 911.”

Smack then further confessed:

“Dick came around. He's the guy who broke my father's leg and popped his shoulders in the ring. I didn't want to see him again. Especially as he got me pregnant and wasn't going to admit it was his baby. I lost the kid anyway. As I told him to get lost, he just broke my nose with his forehead, punched me in the stomach, kicked my chin with his knee and pushed me away. I was desperate and heard him and Bass fight. I was trying to get to my feet, and staggered to the kitchen, when got my hands on the knife. By that time, they were flying through the closed door already and I saw Dan and Timmy grabbing Dick. He was fighting to get lose and already shook Timmy off, when I got to him and stabbed him.”

Bass and Smack were taken to the hospital for a check-up after that, as both were hurt as well. The cops brought me and dad to dad's place, where we both hit the bed. I was out like a light.

In the morning, I smelled pancakes. Dad got up before me and made them. He even had the maple syrup, butter and blueberries. I felt like a little kid again, who's been taken care off.

“Gotta take care of my guest.” Dad said. “And you must get your strength from somewhere, otherwise the future Ms Sawyer might lose that charming smile of hers.”

Right, I was engaged to marry, found out what happened to my mom, how Mitch was involved in all of this, lost my apartment, had three of the guys I managed taken to the hospital and from there at least one will go to jail. Damn, why can't life ever be dull?

“Eat up, I'm taking you to meet Greta today. So, you'll see where the Miller family lives. You're in for a treat.”

It was all too much for me, so I was just enjoying the moment. Spending a nice morning with my dad, eating pancakes, like it was my birthday all over again.

When we got to this palace, I thought I was dreaming. They had their own park, behind the iron fence, with a fountain in front and a swimming pool in the back. There were at least 30

bedrooms and they said, this is their summer residence, where Suzy will live, until she settles in. They didn't feel she should stay at their mansion out in the country.

The truth was, this was Max's love nest and he was giving it up for Suzy. He already got a penthouse, where he stashed Hillary away for the time being, as Greta was in town. Not that Greta doesn't know about Hillary, or Stacy, or Dolores... and who knows which other woman Max had to empty his balls, but it didn't feel right them meeting.

"Here's the deal!" Max started, when we all gathered in the sitting room. "Timothy and Susan start appearing together on the shows. Just vaguely passing each other, not really being connected in a story line, except the promo, where Moneybags says, he's retiring from being a manager and Nurse Nelly says she has compassion for everybody who was ever hurt by Fist, including Moneybags."

That was smart. People should get just a hint of us meeting.

"But, for the winter, they'll both go to the mountains together. Enjoy some time in the snow, spend Christmas up north in Alaska with the Aurora above them. And they'll come back married. Quadrusso can write about it in the magazine, a sickening love story right out of a soap opera. And on the Valentine's massacre we show the two of you off as a couple. By that time the company will already be in Suzy's hands and if they try to hit us with the antitrust law, they can go suck a lemon."

"Did your PI already give you the green light?" Dad asked.

"Screw that. The kids are getting married. He's only searching, so we're on the safe side. If he digs anything up, we have to know before the opposition does. That's the only way we can protect ourselves.

So, this time, kid, for real – welcome to the family!"

I was really happy for it, when all of a sudden, a police car stopped in front of the house.

"We're looking for a Timothy Sawyer!"

"He's still a minor. I'm his father, what's going on."

"We have to take him down to the station for questioning."

Everybody was looking at me: "There was a fight between my roommate and some guy in my apartment last night." I told them and went with the officer. Dad joined me.

At the station, the first question was: "How long have you been dealing drugs?"

Dad and I were in shock.

"Don't deny. We found this at your place. Where did you get it?" And they put a small bag of some dust on my desk.

"This is the first time I see it."

"That's what your girl says too, and you were the only ones living there."

Bass! It must have been him. Or maybe Dick.

"Must have fallen off one of the guys who had a fight. I have nothing to do with this."

"Look, kid, you better start talking. We can charge you for pimping and dealing. We know the girl as having sex with many guys and we found drugs at your place. So, tell us everything you know, or we'll throw the book at you."

Dad looked at me: "I know they're your friends. But don't cover for them, if they've done such stupid shit, they started pulling knives on each other."

"I really and honestly don't know a thing about this bag.

Some time ago, Bass, that's the guy who wasn't stabbed, lost his job in the ring, so he was looking for a place to stay. I offered he moves in with me. He was my roommate for a while and moved out. About that time, Nik, Smack's dad, was getting out of the hospital. Dick put him there in a shoot fight. As Smack lost her baby that night, on account of Nick hitting her, she couldn't stand the thought of living with her old man. We were old school friends, so she moved in with me.

Yes, we had sex, but we weren't a couple. And lately, I wasn't home all that much, just realized she and Bass started seeing each other. Even arranged for him to move in with Smack, as I was looking for another place. I'd have the landlord change the lease from my name to them at the same price, and they could stay there together.

And then last night this. Honestly, that's all I know."

"And the bag?"

"I really have no clue about the bag."

The cop looked at me and dad and said: "And where does this Bass live? We couldn't find any address."

I described how they can get to his place.

"Were you there often?"

"No. Helped him move in, when he was bringing in a fridge. That was the only time I visited his place."

"OK. I believe you. You can go. Just sign the statement on the way out."

Dad looked at the cop: "So, what was up with the bag?"

"Pure coke." The cop said. "Found much more at the place the kid described. Guess Bass kept his stash. And many other things too. From hash, LSD to steroids and growth hormones. Dick told us all about it, how Bass was supplying other wrestlers with it. We just wanted to make sure if your kid was part of the network, because Dick mentioned his name a few times, but with no direct implication. Anyway, the neighbours confirmed it, Bass only showed up at your place a few days ago and there were no weird people around, while he was your roommate. Si I guess you're clean. But you really should be more careful who you're hanging out with kid. There's so many suspicious characters out there today, you can never be sure."

We didn't return to the Miller mansion. We just went to dad's place. Mitch was there, waiting for us. Before dad could unlock the door, he asked: "What happened?"

"Bass was dealing drugs and Dick ratted him out. They thought I was in on it, but let me off the hook."

"Were you in on it?" Mitch asked.

"No, I wasn't. I haven't touched the stuff since I stopped carrying envelopes backstage and Bass... damn, that could have been me!"

Dad and Mitch nodded at each other "That's why I pulled you off that duty. And you were complaining about smelly socks."

We all had a laugh.

"With all the luck, I thought I was having, I just see you were really all looking out for me."

I went over and gave Mitch a big hug.

"You told him?" Mitch asked dad.

"He's old enough. He's got the right to know."

“Yeah, we were looking out for you. And your mom kept an eye on you from up there too, you know, kiddo. You couldn’t be that lucky otherwise.”

“I suggest you stay with me, until you get married, then you’ll be moving in with your new bride, I guess. It was about time you got out of there anyway. Imagine you getting stabbed last night.”

“Oh, Steve asked me to give you these. It’s that new contract Ducky sent... the big one.”

“Thanks Mitch. You wanna get in on the deal?”

“Nah, I leave these things to you. But if possible, book me in and let me earn some money that way. I’m sure you’ll think of something.”

“Don’t I always?”

They shook hands and Mitch was off to the gym.

“And here’s the contract. Steve, Centy, you and me... we each get a quarter of a million, to create a middle east fraction all Americans will love to hate.”

“That’s easy, dad. We already got it covered.”

“And if they hate them bad enough, we move on, beyond wrestling. Centy isn’t part of that deal anymore, so he’ll have to be paid off in a different way, while we split ten million among ourselves.”

I whistled: “I’m getting married to a rich girl and I’m making money on my own. I guess Mitch is right. Mom is looking down on me from heaven. And you started hating church.”

“Don’t forget. The church says if you kill yourself, you’re not going to heaven, but to the other place... from where you cannot help anybody.”

“Oh! Well fuck church then. My mom is in heaven!”

He patted me on the back.

***** *Counting down***

As if I wasn’t living in the fast track before... now everything was just blurring past me at hyper speed. It was crazy!

First off, I must say that Smack and her dad made up, after she had no place to go, because Dick ruined her place too. She stuck around Mitch, who really had sympathy for her losing her unborn child and all and was appearing on C shows, as ladies wrestling still wasn’t a big thing in LLW. Bass got 10 years, so he might get out in three on good behaviour. Dick got 5 years for assault on Smack and they dropped the charges for attacking Bass as he blew the whistle on him. So, he might be out in two years. The rest of the boys were going along. Centy kept writing stories, but never invited me to his place again. Barney kept running the gym, training with Fist, who got many other guys to help him. Max started taking the LLW tours, with quite some of the team going with him, Hillary included. Now, that the company expended nationwide, there had to be somebody running the show on the road and somebody defending the fortress. Max was more certain everything will be OK on the home front, so he went to where the action is. And me... well, although dad said I can use the bed at his place, I spent all of my free time with Suzy. We had a lot to talk about, wanting to catch up on so many things.

She was just so great. You could see right away, she had good schooling, but she was really smart too. What’s the difference? Well, people either are or aren’t smart! For the people who

aren't smart, it helps that they get access to knowledge, so they get the education. But that won't mean they can think for themselves. Smart people do the best they have with the knowledge they have access too. So, put a smart person in a library and they'll come out a genius. Out a person who's not smart in the same library and they'll come out the same way they went in. Suzy was both and I really enjoyed it. We used to go for hours without thinking of sex, because we were talking about everything. And one day she said something about college. I remembered Max telling my dad we'd both go to the same place.

She was so excited! She had her mind made up that she'd go to Columbia University, to the business school so she can take over the family business when the time comes. She even admitted, she was hoping to find a boyfriend there, who'd be a first-class lawyer, to help her out... but now that she met me, she'll just hire a law company. That's why she planned for me to become a marketing specialist as that seemed to be what I'm second best at, and she won't have to pay for the services of such agencies and will be able to afford the law firm.

When I asked her, what's the thing I'm best at, she just sat in my lap, started rubbing her pants around my pants and taking her blouse off.

Yes, we were still having more sex than a mad march hare and it was all good, in fact, it was better with each try. I guess it helped we didn't have horny kid sex, where each wanted to get satisfaction. We were really enjoying playing with each other, and it was just being relaxed and having fun. Sometime we just sopped, if somebody had something else to do, without even coming, and then hitting it on latter. No pressure, no hurry, just joy.

And we did the work we were supposed to do. The shows were produced, storylines prepared... I was telling Suzy about that, while she was telling me about running the budget for a single show production and how we then make profit from everything – from TV commercials run during our programmes, from TV deals, from merch sales, from sales throughout magazines, kiosk sales – especially before the show and also concessions, so the guys are even allowed to sell there... not to forget the ticket sale, which I already knew how it worked.

We didn't officially say anything about the wedding, but before the winter break the whole locker decided to give us a huge party... you know, just mixing it up – you know, for me and Suzy. So there were all the guys and girls from the ring, all the managers, writers, technicians, cameramen, reporters... and they wanted to know, who the bride's maid and best man will be.

Suzy just blasted off: "Christina! She's been my best friend ever since we've met at the audition for the role of Young Grace Kelly. How about you, Timmy?"

The question surprised me, as honestly, I didn't really have friend outside the business. There were Spike, Smack, Smooth and Bass from school, with Smack not being the best candidate and Bass off in jail... I didn't really feel any special connection with Spike or Smooth anymore... and it felt weird to have my dad be my best man "Steve. There's no other guy outside family I respect more." And then I looked over at Mitch saying: "And you, count as family." Because I really felt so.

Anyway, I was sure Max will pay for everything and it will all be planned out. Afterwards, we all got drunk and celebrated... making me think: "Suzy, we'll have to stay sober for our wedding!"

"Why?"

“We’ll be emancipated only afterwards, and even then, we’re not allowed to drink before 21. I’m sure there will be tons of reports there and we don’t want something like this to spoil our public image.”

“That’s why I love you Tim Sawyer. You’re always thinking and trying to keep everything safe and under control.”

That was the night that Bass died of overdose.

Took me two years to finally got around to asking the question what happened to Bass. And I wouldn’t if it weren’t for a comment by Centy about who’d drop dead overdosing this time, when a scandal about AZT, the AIDS curing drug, was coming to a conclusion.

They never figured out how Bass got drugs in the cell and from what Smack told me, he wasn’t on the needle. Three days before, he got a visit, by a hooker, but the guards testimonies said, they were just talking and were never alone. According to description, she looked a lot like Hillary, who was supposed to be on the tour with Max.

Maybe my work got me paranoid, but I think Hill was there to convince him to keep his mouth shut, as Bass might have been ready to make a deal, to shorten his sentence. A wrestler in jail for possessing or dealing drugs... that’s one thing. But him saying, he was distributing them to other wrestlers... that’s something that can hurt the industry.

I’m just not sure, to what extend Max is involved as only times there were issues with steroids and drugs, was when Hill was hanging around the company. But then again, he was the one, letting her hang around.

So we had a wild party with everybody joining in, singing, tearing the venue apart after the show... the ring rats joined in, the security and police were in on the fun as well... we just had to make sure, nobody from the outside got in.

The wedding itself was a high-class affair, but very few people were there, to make it look modest. They did a good job to keep it covered until we start showing it all on TV at Valentine’s massacre pay-per-view. I still felt like royalty and Suzy was the perfect princess. Most charming and most desirable young lady out there, with a bride’s maid fresh from shooting a TV show for FOX TV.

My best man, Steve, had a long talk about the importance of marriage and how marriage is the foundation of expanding families, therefore it must be based on unconditional trust. I guess he had his doubts about Bass overdosing even back then. But then again, nothing gets pass Steve. He even got me wedding present I really appreciated. He got me a Portable 386i.

Things were only going up for me and 1988 was going to be the best year of my life and all because of Suzy and the way she makes me feel... she really turns me on, and knocks me off of my feet and my lovely days are hopefully forever gone!

The New Year’s tour was doing great and I couldn’t wait for the Valentine’s day pay off, when the world will find out about us, and we worked it in an angle!

“And now, before this evening’s main event, here is the president and owner of Liberty League Wrestling, Mr Miller!”

Max made his way down to the ring.

“Ladies and gentlemen, dear wrestling fans... my friends! Some of you may already know this, although we tried to keep it a secret, but the paparazzi are everywhere and the news was already leaked in the magazines. I’m a very proud man, whose daughter got married over the holidays, with one of our industry’s finest minds!

Please welcome, Susan and Timothy!”

Mendelssohn’s Wedding March started playing and we walked down the ring to greet the crowd. Suzy was wearing really high heels, to make it seem she’s got longer legs, which she was showing off. I was wearing padded shoulders, to look like I’m bigger. We waved off to the public and Max said: “Kids, as you haven’t had your honeymoon yet, I’ve got you tickets to see the last still standing wonder of the world! I’m sending you to Egypt!”

We were happy and that really was the honeymoon we went to in a few months’ time. But right now, it was an angle!

We were stepping down the ring stairs, when a woman crawled from under the ring, completely covered and attacked Suzy and put a huge garbage bag over Suzy!

“You kafir! You will never enter a Muslim country showing such disrespect, you walking porn puppet!”

It was Hill, completely dressed in a burka. And the microphone the ring announcer just got back from Max in the ring, picked up all what she said.

The crowd was boing. Yes, there’s always this reaction when somebody attacks a hot chick that has not been presented as a cruel and evil woman that had it coming to her, the crowd will react this way. The wheels were set in motion big time.

After the battle royal, when Brogan won fair and square, he dedicated the victory to the newlyweds calling us back to the ring saying: “Ain’t nobody spoiling the romance on my watch. That’s just not the American way.”

With that being said, the crowd cheered us on, making our way to the ring and Brogan was a full face already, over as with his first face run! The Fist deal was a done thing – not even sabotage could spoil it.

So when the wrestlers were drawing numbers for the Countdown fight, which was all pre-taped, the Sand Gene was spitting and yelling “Kafir!” at Suzy, so Brogan protected her and they already had a stare down, so when Brogan was called out on a live show as the odds on favourite to win, and the Arabian Knights attacked him, the crowd started chanting “Muslims, go home!” When Fist ran out to help Brogan, he got the pop of the evening and when Brogan asked him to take his place and Fist said: “I will avenge you, fellow patriot!” the crowd lost its mind. They were cheering until the planted stodes started singing the Star-Spangled Banner and the whole arena joined in. It gave me goose bumps.

When we published it, well known representatives of the Islamic community started protesting our programme, that is why at one of the meetings Steve was talking to Max about it: “Do I have your word, we can push it further? You won’t pull the plug because of the bad publicity this is bringing in? It can hurt your TV deals.”

“You’re the crowd control manager, Steve.”

“Right, I’ll go public saying we cannot control the response of the crowd, how we believe in freedom of speech and expression and how it’s the god given right of every Jesus loving American to support their way of life and how we respect the beauty of our women.”

“Perfect, pour more oil on the fire, while making people who’d want to cancel us on the non-patriotic side.”

“The countdown counter hit zero, the big event is now!” Max was roaring in the ring.

All the wrestlers gathered in the broadened ring area behind the ring posts, matching the colour of their team. We had to give up some 100 places, but the crowd was so huge, that never

hurt the gate. Fist got the biggest cheer. Before the beginning, just to make sure, Brogan showed up on the Jumbo Tron, with Suzy by his side, to wish Fist good luck. Just like they told me, when I got the job for making Fist the superstar – stuff it down everybody’s throat until they start liking the guy. It worked like a charm!

The match got on its way and there were many eliminations already, when the Samurai brothers, on red and black team, working together, cleared the ring. Fist came in for the blue team and dad started saying on the commentary: “Now that’s the perfect fighter for such a match.”

“And, how about this! The Bouncer also entered the ring, as the last man for the white team!” So there was Mitch, as the last white competitor, Fist with O’Toole waiting as the last of the blue team, Cop Killer Alex on the red team, waiting for one of the Samurais to be thrown out and 3 more wrestlers on the white team, waiting their chance – and the next in line was the and Gene and two more masked wrestlers on the outside.

While Mitch was going through the ropes Fist jumped him. The Samurais decide to let them fight it out for a while. Mitch started defending himself, punching fist and picking him up, to throw out of the ring. That’s when the Samurais jump them, to push them both out. They both fall out.

Cop Killer Alex jumps into the ring while O’Toole is still arguing with the crowd, when people start cheering on the side when Fist and Mitch got eliminated. Mitch hit the floor, but was holding Fist, so he never touched the ground and can return to the ring! A stodge from the public even gave him his chair across the railing, so he can stand on it, not touching the ground. From the chair he leaped back to the apron. The Samurais were beating down Alex, who started bleeding, when Fist double clotheslines them both, eliminating them.

Sand Gene comes in! Fist starts exchanging blows with him, until Gene uses his *magic* on Fist (blowing sand to his eyes). Bleeding Alex was helpless on the floor and Gene just pushed him out and walked over to Fist, who still couldn’t see. Gene started beating on him and had him flat on the floor. When gloating over him, Fist hit him with a low blow! Gene bent over and leaned on the ropes. Fist just jumped up and kicked him in the butt, to shove him out of the ring. The crowd was wild with excitement.

Just then both masked guys jump Fist, start pounding on him, beating him to a pulp, only to take the masks off, revealing they’re the Arabian Knights, the tag champs. The refs are trying to get them out, as they can only enter one at a time. That’s when Fist gets up, dropkicks one of them in the back, forcing him out of the ring. The other Knight wanted to grab Fist, but he kicked him in the gut, raised him over the head and carried him to the side of the ring. Refs were telling him, not to drop the man, so he just released him behind his back and the Knight fell in the ring. Fist rolled him under the bottom rope and the crowd started cheering, as the black, red and white team were eliminated. Fist climbed the second turn buckle and started posing, when O’Toole enters, the last member of the blue team.

Fist looks at him with suspicion in his eyes, but O’Toole extends the hand to congratulate him. They shake, but O’Toole twist the arm behind Fist dragging him towards the ropes to throw him out.

Fist gets furious, breaks out of the hold, starts punching and locks his head under the arm for the chinlock slam. Smack jumps the rails and comes to the ringside, waving with her hands shouting: “Don’t do it Jason. You’re better than that!”

Fist stops and O'Toole delivers a low blow. Fist collapses, hanging on the top rope. O'Toole runs to the other side for momentum to get shoulder-block Fist out of the ring, but Fist dives down, pulling the top rope and O'Toole eliminates himself.

Smack jumps to the ring, hugging Fist and raising his hand, saying:

"I always knew you weren't a monster."

Fist catches his breath, picks her on the shoulder, parades around the ring and the Battle Hymn of the Republic starts blasting out the speakers!

The show ends by everybody joining it singing: "Glory, glory, halleluiah!" and dad saying for the TV audience: "I guess July 4th came early this year!"

We were all cheering at the debriefing next morning, in the hotel conference room.

"Here's to my son in law! The genius who made our new superstar – Jason Fist Armstrong!"

Everybody started clapping, so I had to say something: "And now, we have the new tag team – Fist and Brogan, The Patriots. We're not building them as a long-term tag team, just as brothers in arms, on a mission to get the tag team belts back to America!"

"Hey, wise-ass, stop talking and start kissing! You and I are on our way to our honeymoon!"

There was a limo waiting for us outside.

"I believe we'll manage without the two of you for a while!" Mitch laughed.

"Good luck and bon voyage!" Dad said.

"Go out there and see the world, before you start with college." Steve said, slipping me an envelope in my jacket pocket.

"And don't forget to work on me becoming the fittest, youngest and happiest grandpa in the world!" Max told us, sending us off.

We were just too happy and if not making, we'll at least be practicing for it, so dad and Max will become grandpas. Although, that would put Suzy's college off for quite a while, so I was pretty sure, we can wait for some time.

I pulled the envelope from my pocket.

"What's that, sweetie?"

"Something Steve gave me."

I got pale, when I saw it. I was expecting it, but when it came this far, I was still shocked.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. The analytics is getting a new deal and they want me on the team."

"That's great. How much will you get?"

I was excited to tell her that, proving I can really make it, and I wasn't marrying her for the money. "One third of ten million."

"Making your first million before being 18. Now that's impressive!"

I just never told her, how dad and Steve believed, this is part of preparation for a new big war in the middle east, with the war between Iraq and Iran still not over.

"Now, stop thinking and undress because it's going to be mighty hot where you're going."

"It's only March."

"Egypt is very warm in March... besides, I'll make sure you melt!"

Epilogue: A cog in the machine

I often wonder, if the world would have been any different without me collecting all that cash? Sure, there'd be somebody else, who'd try and get the job done. But would that person be as effective?

The war between Iraq and Iran ended that summer and I went to college full of hope dad and Steve were wrong. However, before I graduated the Gulf War started and Saddam Hussein became America's enemy number one. We just had to twitch the character a bit... I mean, we've built up a heel stable with Arabian Knights as the tag team, repackaged Sand Gene into Major Mosul, with a few more middle east sounding names associated in the stable and the woman covered in the Burka – although it was usually a guy, ripping all other girls apart, except for Smack, who could stand up even to him.

I kept remembering influential opinion makers... from Plato, putting word into Socrates' mouth, Caesar taking Gaul gold pretending to cultivate savages, the Pope quoting the all loving god of the Bible to call for the massacre of the crusades, the eradication of Cathars, Philip slaughtering the Templar knights, The Holy Inquisition, all the prosecutions of Jews in Europe throughout centuries, Machiavelli, Nietzsche, right down to Goebbels... I was sure that if any of them wouldn't write or did what they did, somebody else would. So, I was nothing but a cog in the machinery either.

On the other hand, it worked out pretty good for me personally. Married, finished college, became a father, and I'm running this company together with Suzy, making ever more money. Ducky still has me by the balls, like he did Steve.

Now, with the internet and everything, my work is even easier. We can invade any home and even hack into people's lives through their own cameras and microphones. But with everything we've did, I sometimes get my conscience acting up on me.

There's a saying somewhere in Europe – you'd pay a buck to come to a party and pay two, just so they'd let you leave. It's not happening. It's like Hotel California, where the dream factory is. I can never leave. Will Alexander have a choice, if he inherits my and Suzy's money? Maybe if we build him up to become the next US president... although with JFK's example, I'm not sure even that's high enough to put him out of such people's reach.