# I Hate That I Love You

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I Hate That I Love You  
by Wrestling_SWK (SnowWhiteKnight)

**Summary**

“You know you really love someone when you cannot hate them for breaking your heart.”

A "what if there had been an unofficial fourth member of the Shield" story.

**Notes**

I got bored...and I've been watching a lot of old episodes lately. This is probably crap, just FYI. This is completely kayfabe, so there is no references to old personas (Tyler Black, Jon Moxley, etc.) or their real names, and I try to keep their personal lives limited to what the general public knows about. Obviously, I do take a lot of liberties for "backstage" scenes, because I wasn't there nor do I know how backstage actually works, and I base a lot of the interactions/dialog on their onscreen personas, plus stuff I've read in the comics, media, and interviews. I have never met Roman or Seth (though I hope to someday), and I very briefly got to meet Dean at a Smackdown live event back in Jan 2017. He touched my hand in a failed fist bump, which was totally my fault, when he was going backstage after a match. He was victorious, by the way, but I didn't get to talk to him or anything.

Also, I started writing this before I knew Colby Lopez had a girlfriend, but I was way too invested in this story to just stop so...yeah. Sorry? I don't know what else to say. In my defense, I'm trying to stick to the character aspects but it gets really, really fuzzy when
writing these particular types of characters! Wrestlers in-ring personas blend a lot with their real life personas, and... it's hard. *sigh* Anyway, this story is about the character Seth Rollins, and not about the person Colby Lopez, and it does not include his girlfriend Sarah (lovely lady, from what I can tell, and I wish them the best). It does include his ex-girlfriend and ex-fiance, but I try to keep that to a minimum, and the same goes toward the real people in Colby's life.

As stated before, a lot of the interactions between characters in this story are based on what I've seen in videos, tweets, and also on assumptions, so take all of this with a grain of salt. It's not meant to be a "behind the scenes" exposé or anything, just something I started thinking of in my first year of watching WWE, and it sort of grew into this, because why not? Can't seem to write my own original work, so why not this, ya know?

Uh, anyway, if Sarah or Seth ever read this and want me to stop...uh, first, HI!! But also, I will, just let me know. I do try to keep it separate as best I could and I worked really hard on this, so please give it a chance. I hope everyone who reads it enjoys it.

EDIT: 05/13/2019 - so, Sarah and Seth have broken up since I last updated this story (chapter 28) and just today, Seth and Becky Lynch have announced that they are dating. Since I was not incorporating Sarah into the story, I won't be doing that with Becky either, just FYI. I hope to update soon, but who knows at this point.

If anyone wants to contact me, for any reason, including the above mentioned, my tumblr and twitter names are on my profile, and I welcome messages in both places. More likely to answer on Twitter though.

A note before reading:
Y/N = your name, either first name or first and last as the case may be. That part is up to you. :)
“Hey, baby girl. Wait up,” I heard behind me. I turned to see my friend Roman walking towards me with two other guys.

“Hey. What’s up?”

“I, uh… I need to talk to you about something. Guys, meet Y/N. She's one of the best people I know.” Gesturing to the one on his right, he said, “This is Dean Ambrose.” The handsome, sandy haired man smirked at me, giving me a nod and an appreciative look. Roman gestured to the man on his left, “This is Seth Rollins.” Tall, dark and good looking, my heart skipped a beat and my mouth went dry as I looked into his eyes. I had seen him around, of course, both of them, but Seth had caught my eye from the moment I saw him wrestle in the ring. I had watched him in fascination, silently cheering for him just three months prior when he rose through the Gold Rush Tournament to become the first NXT champion. I had never really spoken to him or had any interaction other than possibly passing him in the hallway. He was much too cool to take notice of me, and I was much too shy to be noticeable. At least, until that very moment.

It took me a moment to realize how hard I was gripping my clipboard. He grinned, obviously realizing his effect on me. “Um, hi,” I said in a quiet voice, giving both men a shy smile. Roman laughed, the jerk.

“Baby girl, we have a favor to ask you. We started--”

“It was my idea,” Seth interrupted.

“Fine,” Roman said, rolling his eyes. “Seth suggested and then we decided it was a good idea to start a group. We're going to call ourselves the Injustice League. Righting the injustices of the world. Or at least the wrestling world. What do you think?”

I blinked in surprise and stared at Roman. “Well, I like the idea, but that name...it sounds like a villain group. You'd get painted into a corner as heels, whether you are or not.”

“You got a better suggestion, kid?” Dean asked with a sneer.

I took a moment to think about it. “You need something more general, like The Company, or Tanks, or Swords of--”

“Shield! The Shield,” Seth said. “We'll be the Shield. And we can spell it out like the military! With Delta, Charlie kind of shit.”

“Oh, we did say our look could be mercenaries,” Roman said. Dean was nodding, liking the idea.

“Thanks, dollface. You've got some good ideas in that pretty head of yours.” Seth grinned at me and my heart skipped another beat.

“Oh, um, thanks?” I hadn’t really done anything, but his praise was overloading my brain.

He walked over to my side and slung his arm over my shoulders. I'm sure my face turned about a billion shades of red. “Guys, I think we should keep her around. Make her our mascot, or manager or something. What do you say?”
Dean shrugged, but Roman looked at me studiously. “She does have a talent for diplomacy and evaluating. And can sweet talk just about anyone. It wouldn't hurt to have her with us. What do you say, baby girl?”

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Raw - June 2, 2014, the night after Payback

“Hey, dollface. You’re looking particularly good today.” I smiled as I turned to face my unofficial favorite member of The Shield, Seth Rollins. I was never too busy for him and he knew it. He flashed his cocky smile, “Miss me?”

I rolled my eyes at him, but I was still smiling. “I just saw you half an hour ago, Seth.” In the time the Shield had been together, we had become a family. Brothers Roman, Dean and Seth, and me, the little sister. Except Seth was the only one I didn’t consider my brother. He was so much more to me than that. He was also the only one that didn’t refer to me as his little sister. Roman and Dean teased him that I would get the wrong idea, but I held no illusions about this. I couldn’t compare to his fiancée, a wonderful woman that treated me like family, nor did I want to. I just wanted Seth to be happy, and it made me happy to be by his side as a friend. Our bond was different than the ones I had with Roman and Dean and I cherished it.

He shrugged, still grinning. “Doesn’t mean you can’t miss me. Hey, crazy earlier, right? Bautista quitting…” The man had demanded a title shot from Triple H, one of our bosses and leader of the Evolution faction, who had turned him down, telling Bautista to wait. He had not taken it well. At the Payback pay-per-view the night before, the Shield had gone to war with them for a second time, emerging victorious in the Gauntlet match, a complete shutout of Evolution. They had attempted to use me as leverage against the Shield, but Seth had rescued me before it was too late. Saying I had a case of hero worship for him was an understatement, since Seth was usually the one who saved me if I was ever in trouble. My crush on Seth was probably the worst kept secret around the ring. Everyone knew, though he thought it was cute, and to his credit, he had never encouraged me or lead me on. He even defended me if anyone made fun of my feelings for him. I respected that, grateful that he didn’t tease me (too much) for it, and I honestly tried to keep things professional between us. I did feel guilty that he had to rescue me, though.

Sometimes, I toyed with the idea that I should learn to defend myself better, plus I had taken some martial arts classes in high school, but the guys wouldn’t hear of it. I wore clothing that matched theirs. Roman said it was enough to deter the smaller fry and that they would handle the bigger threats. I did enjoy wearing my black combat pants, kickass boots, and an altered Shield t-shirt, which was fitted nicely to my frame. Unlike Roman or Seth though, I wore my long hair up in a high ponytail.

“Yeah, though I can’t imagine what he thought would happen, demanding his shot at the title like that. Oh, before anything else…” I took hold of his combat vest so that I could pull him down to kiss his cheek. It was a good luck ritual we had. Not just Seth, but Dean and Roman as well. They never went out without getting a kiss on the cheek from me. It didn't always work, but the percentile was pretty darn high, so better safe than sorry. Plus, I just liked having an excuse to kiss Seth.

“Did you give one to Roman and Dean yet?” he asked me.

“No,” I said with a frown. “They were distracted and told me ‘Later’, and now I can’t find them. You’re all due out in just a few minutes.” I had been worried over the bickering the three of them had been doing these past few months, but last night, when they had come together to win, I had
breathed a sigh of relief. Their distraction today was only slightly worrying in comparison, but still troubling.

“Ah, well, I’m sure it will be alright… Anyway, I was wondering,” he said, taking my hand in his. “How would you like to go out with me tonight? Just us, I mean. No Dean, no Roman, just you, me and a nice dinner for two? As friends, of course,” he added quickly.

“Really? I would love that!” Yet something didn't feel quite right. “Are you ok? You seem off…”

“Yeah, I'm fine,” he said softly. “More than fine. Though, uh, let’s keep this a secret from everyone. You know how people gossip. I just… I want to have a good, long talk with you. Serious stuff. Good stuff, but serious. I've got a car out back. Wait for me there, and I'll meet you after the Shield takes care of some business with remainder of Evolution. I’ll let the others know you’ll be with me.” He kissed my forehead softly. It was a gesture all three had taken to doing, but I liked it most from Seth. His breath was warm against my skin, and smelled slightly of cinnamon. He lingered a little longer than usual, then pulled away to smile at me, touching my hairpin. He had given it to me when the Shield had won their first PPV match at TLC two years ago, and I considered it my lucky charm, even if it was an angry looking skull with a pink bow on it. “Now go on, get out of here.”

“Oh…” I replied, hugging my now trademark clipboard to my chest and feeling like I was on cloud nine. My work for the day was done, so it wasn't a big deal to leave before the guys had their match. Maybe he's finally going to make a serious run for the heavyweight championship? I know he wants to, but he's worried about what Ro and Dee will think. I'll stand with him, get them to see that the championship doesn't have to come between them. Oh! This is going to be exciting!

It was a fluke that had me back in the arena when everything went to hell. How many things have turned out differently because of a forgotten item, in my case, my skull hairpin. It had fallen from my hair after talking to Seth. I found it, and proceeded to watch in horror as Seth attacked Roman and Dean, and then gave Randy the opportunity to beat them down. I couldn’t move at all.

“No…” It had been a lie. Seth had used my crush on him to make sure I was out of the picture, making sure there was nothing that I could do to help them. He lied and I bought it, hook, line and sinker.

I somehow managed to avoid being seen as Seth, Hunter, and Randy came backstage, and rushed to Roman and Dean in the medical room. “Ro, Dee,” I sobbed as they were helped onto cots by the med staff. “I'm sorry… I'm so sorry…”

“What are you sorry for, baby girl?” Roman coughed out. “Did you help him?”

“No! Of course not! But I should have been with you...maybe if I had--”

“You would have been caught in the crossfire, kiddo,” Dean said, pulling me down into an awkward hug. “And we wouldn't have wanted that, no matter what help you would have been. I'm glad you're safe.”

“Hey, if he gets a hug, I want one, too,” Roman growled. Dean snorted, but let me go so that I could hurry to Roman’s side. I tried to be careful, he was covered in so many bruises, but he pulled me onto the cot he was laying on and hugged me fiercely. “I'm glad you're safe, too, baby girl. I was worried when I realized I didn't know where you were.”

“Seth…” I shuddered and buried my face in Roman’s neck. “Seth tricked me. He asked me… asked me to wait for him outside the arena… I didn't think… I mean, I thought…”
All three of us turned to see Seth standing in the doorway. He looked angry, staring daggers at Roman, who kept his arms around me protectively.

“Stay where you are,” Roman whispered to me.

Some wordless communication went between the three men, and then Dean got up from his cot. “You're going to have to go through us, traitor.”

Seth’s entire body went tense. “Y/N. Can we talk outside?”

Roman growled, but I angrily said, “Why? Going to take a chair to me, too? Feed me, your little mouse of a manager, to the Viper?!”

A flicker of panic crossed Seth’s face. “Dollface…”

“No! You tricked me, Seth! You knew how I felt about you!” The emotion was rising up from my chest as I spoke. I felt pain in my heart and in my palm. “You knew! And you used it against me! To get me out of the way so you could betray our brothers!”

“They’re not my brothers! Not anymore!” Seth roared. “Forget this! I'm out of here!”

I collapsed on Roman as soon as Seth was gone, sobbing at the loss of a trusted friend. “Kiddo,” Dean said. “Your hand… you’re bleeding.” I looked down at my hand. My skull hairpin was covered in blood. I had gripped it so hard that I broke the skin of my palm.
Wrestlemania 31 - March 2015

Chapter Notes

Time jump!

Wrestlemania - March 29, 2015 (Nine Months Later)

“You going to cut your hair again? It’s getting to a good length,” Natalya asked me, fingering the short locks of my hair. In my misery, I had cut it the night the Shield had disbanded to an unprecedented short length. Well, unprecedented for me. It had nearly been a crew cut, but I had needed the change and it felt like a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. Roman and Dean had been appalled, but there hadn’t been much they could do except urge me to donate the cut locks to a charity. It had been a very dark time for me, and I had spent time away from the company. Not that anyone beside Roman or Dean had noticed. Certainly not Seth, or if he did, he didn't make it known. My butchered hair had been the least of my problems.

In the time since, I had mostly just had it trimmed once a month to keep the dry ends away. It hadn’t been the only change I had done, but it was the most noticeable. I didn’t wear black combat pants anymore, usually donning khaki or dark grey carpenter pants instead, and the shirts I now wore were plain t-shirts of various dark colors. I didn’t feel right choosing between Roman’s or Dean’s merchandise. I had kept the kickass combat boots though. They were damn comfortable and easier to run in, should the situation call for it.

“Don’t know,” I replied. Wrestlemania was upon us, starting in just a few short hours. It is a time to go big or go home, but for me, maybe a small, yet positive, change. “It’s almost long enough for a bob style. Maybe I should just--”

“Y/N! Got a minute?” I turned to see Stephanie McMahon walking towards me. I hated Steph for taking Seth from us. Not just her. I hated all of the Authority, the faction reborn again from the ashes of Evolution, but she was the one I dealt with most often. Natalya whispered a quick goodbye and left.

“Sure.” I may hate Stephanie, but I'm not an idiot. At least I try not to be one anymore. I learned to play my cards closer to my chest, even if it meant being nice to anyone from the Authority. Anyone not on the “friends” list was an outsider and outsiders only received courtesy. I had perfected my mask of calm indifference, one that put others at ease when speaking to me and hid any of my true feelings. For the most part anyway. I still had moments where I couldn’t hide my feelings. “What can I do for you?”

“You're being promoted.” Her smile was more than a lot suspicious. “Congratulations.”

“I am?” This was definitely a surprise. Because of my association with Roman and Dean, I wasn't exactly on the Authority’s list of favorites. The chances of strings being attached was pretty much guaranteed. “I'm honored, but I am happy where I am, serving as a buffer between the Authority and my brothers.”

“Yes, you've done an excellent job at that,” Steph said, her tone clipped and her nose wrinkled at the thought of Dean and Roman. I had saved both of them on more than one occasion due to my
diplomatic skills, but I had also saved the Authority as well. Paul Heyman, eat your heart out. “We appreciate your efforts, but this promotion is mandatory for you. You don't have the option to say no.”

I stared blankly at her, letting no hint of my thoughts reach the surface. “Alright. What is this new position? Will I still be able to work with Roman and Dean?”

The suspicious smile was back. “Possibly, but possibly not. You will be managing the WWE Heavyweight Champion holder. Wrestlemania starts soon, so it could be Roman, or it could be Brock Lesner.”

“But Paul is his--”

“Paul will remain his advocate,” Steph interrupted. “You are not a mouthpiece like he is, so you will manage things behind the scenes. Same thing you do for them.” She looked behind me and from the look in her eyes, I knew the boys were heading straight for us. “You start once the match ends,” she said before turning on her heel and marching away.

“What’d the bitch want?” Dean asked, his voice low and menacing as he stared in the direction Steph had gone.

“Good news and bad news.”

“Bad first,” Roman said. He always preferred the bad news first.

I took a deep breath. “I won't be managing you two anymore. No getting around it, it seems.”

“Shit...they're trying to separate us.” Dean looked ready to punch someone. I took his hand in mine. Until Renee could see to calming him down, it was up to me. “And the good?”

I have a half-hearted shrug. “I got promoted... to managing the winner of the championship match.”

“What! Congratulations, baby girl!” Dean grunted his congratulations to me as well as Roman swept me up in a hug. “You deserve it. And hey, you might get me all to yourself,” he said with a chuckle.

“Ooh, la de da,” Dean muttered. He shoved his hands into his jean pockets. It didn't take a psychic to guess what was going through his head.

“Dee,” I said. I hated that I wouldn't be there for him in an official capacity. “I'll still be your friend, your little sister. You're not getting rid of me that easily.”

He shrugged his shoulders, but the tension in his body had lessened. I saw Renee heading towards us. Just the person to lift Dean's spirits. It was wonderful and interesting how the two complemented each other. I kissed Renee’s cheek in greeting before Dean dragged her off.

“Guess it's just us two, then,” Roman said. He still had his arm around my shoulder, and to anyone who didn't know us, they might think we were together, but Roman was, is and always will be just my brother. My very handsome brother, but my brother nonetheless.

“I'm starving. Want to go with me to catering?”

“Ah, yessir!” He was also my brother that had a black hole for a stomach.
I couldn’t believe it. It wasn’t possible, and yet… I watched the screen backstage as Seth walked back from the ring, the title belt in his possession. The heist of the century they were calling it. Seth had cashed in his Money In The Bank Contract when Roman and Brock had nearly exhausted each other, had then kicked Brock out of the ring and pinned Roman to take the championship. No… She knew… She KNEW… Stephanie had known who I would be working with, that was why she had been so damn happy. She must have known he would do this. Damn you, Stephanie… And damn you, Seth…

“Ro…” I found him sitting backstage. Dean was with him. I sat on the other side of him, wrapping my arms around him in a hug. He put his arm around me. He was sweaty, and stunk, but I didn’t care. My brother was in pain, physical and emotional, and there was nothing I could do except be here for him. “I’m sorry, Ro.”

“Shit happens. Looks like you’ll be with Seth again.” Roman sighed. “I’m sorry, baby girl. I’m so sorry.”

“It’s not your fault,” I whispered. “It’s no one’s fault except theirs.”

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Raw - March 30, 2015

“Hey, dollface. Miss me?” I turned to see Seth strutting up to me, his two lackeys keeping their distance. I was not a fan of J & J Security, but I was surprised Seth felt the need to keep them around now that he had taken the championship.

I kept my face blank as I looked him up and down, ignoring my traitorous heart skip a beat. “Don’t call me that, Rollins. You’re late. We took the same flight back from New York, you should have been here when I got here. Brock’s been looking for you. Stephanie dragged me out there when Paul was ‘advocating.’ They want a rematch. Tonight.”

Today had been the first time we had really spoken since his betrayal. Since most of my time had been spent with Roman and Dean, they had acted like a buffer. It hurt more than I expected for him to be so blasé, like everything since he had asked me to wait outside the arena nine months ago hadn’t even happened. That pain made it easier to hold on to my anger, made it easier to deal with him coldly, rather than fall into a million sobbing pieces. Never again, I told myself.

He frowned at me, “What did you tell him?”

“I told Stephanie and Paul that there was no way I was arranging that. You haven’t had much sleep since yesterday, even if your time in the ring wasn’t as long as Ro or Brock, you still had a match earlier in the day against Randy, plus adding in jet lag… You’re in no condition to have a match. Neither is Brock, but try telling him that.”

“Aaww, dollface, you do care.” He reached to touch my cheek, but I smacked his hand away before he could touch me.

“No, Rollins. I don’t. I’m doing my damned job. That’s all. Stephanie, however, did not agree with my assessment. She promised Brock his rematch. Now will you get out there already? And stop calling me ‘dollface’.” The muscle in his cheek twitched in annoyance, but he merely shifted the title belt from one shoulder to the other.
“You know, lots of women would kill to be in your position, getting to work with all this,” he said, gesturing to himself. “I am the best in WWE and you get the honor of representing me.”

“They don’t have to kill, they can have it,” I snapped. “Maybe ask one of your adoring fans. You know the ones, that care more about your face and your body than your personality or tendency to betray the people who care about you. Then I can go back to working with people I actually trust and respect.”

“I specifically asked for you to be my new manager!” he exclaimed, as if he expected me to be grateful. “You and me, we could be the best team, rule this place even better than Hunter and Stephanie.”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “Careful, Rollins. That’s not what they would want to hear. You might find yourself without your title sooner rather than later.” I might want to chuck him off a building, but I am a damned professional and as my charge, I would protect Seth to the best of my ability. That included warning him when his mouth was about to get him into trouble. “Take a moment, then you’re due to go out there.”

Seth’s jaw clenched. He turned as if to walk away, but then turned back almost as quickly, his face cheerful again. “You coming with me?”

I sighed. “Yeah. I’m coming with you.”

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I dove out of the way of flying debris from the announcement table. He ran away. Of COURSE he did! I was essential trapped with the others, trying to stay out of the way of the enraged Brock. When I get my hands on him, I’m going to kill him!

I had accompanied Seth with his security team, though I had stayed out of the ring. I wasn’t all that surprised when Seth pulled his little stunt to get out of having the match. I really wasn’t surprised when Brock went after him either. However, I did not expect Seth to leave us out there to deal with Brock on our own, or for Brock to flip the table on Booker T and JBL, or put an F5 on Michael Cole and then another on the poor cameraman, as Stephanie pleaded with Brock. Lillian Garcia, the announcer, had pulled me into the timekeeper’s area, which was relatively safer than near the ring, but still not the safest place to be. My heart was hammering in my chest from fear, hoping against hope that Brock didn’t notice me.

I am so going to kill Seth, I thought as Stephanie screamed that Brock was suspended indefinitely.

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I stood to the side as I watched Seth be interviewed by Renee later that night. I didn’t kill him. I did slap him, and to his credit, he did mumble an apology for leaving me behind, but I was still angry as he taunted Randy on camera.

“Want me to pummel him?” Dean asked from behind me.

I laughed softly. “Nah. I can handle him myself.”

“Should have been out there to protect you. He should have stayed.” Dean put his arm around me. “You’re not supposed to be in danger.”

I shook my head. It was true, but Dean was forgetting that I had been in plenty of danger as the Shield’s manager, not to mention just being his manager. Roman was a lot better about my safety
than Dean was, but it was because Dean just had a tendency to get tunnel vision. “It’s an occupational hazard, Dee. One I’ve accepted. At least I’m quick. Oohhh... a three-on-three match,” I said in a near whisper. Seth had just issued a challenge to Randy. Kane and Big Show would likely be Seth’s partners in this matchup. “This will be interesting.”

“You got an idea, don’t you?” Dean asked.

“Only a bit,” I smirked.

“Anything I can do to help?”

“No, not this time. I need big muscle for this, not crazy muscle.” He laughed and ruffled my hair. “Besides that, it would be super obvious that I’m behind it if you went out as well as Roman.”

“So what’re you going to do?” he asked.

“I need to go see a man about getting fed.”

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“Hey, Ryback!” I called out. “Got a minute?”

“The Big Guy’s always got time for a cutie,” he said, grinning at me. I couldn’t help but return it.

“Don’t know if you heard, but the Authority’s champion lapdog has challenged Orton to a three-on-three match. He’s partnering with Big Show and Kane. Orton needs some backup. If you’re interested, he’s in the locker room.”

“Hmm...aren’t you that lapdog’s new manager?” he asked, raising an eyebrow.

“I am. I am also the manager he abandoned when Brock was rampaging. But, I’m not one to hold grudges. I’m just trying to make sure he gets a good match with some decent talent. It would be a shame for my client to feel unfulfilled in his competition, don’t you agree?” Seth wanted me as his manager, then fine. I would manage him. My way. Which meant making sure he was the best he could possibly be. I was going to tough love Rollins into becoming a better superstar. Even if I had to kill him to do it. And if I could get a little revenge in, who was I to complain?

Ryback grinned again. “Oh, cutie, remind me never to get on your bad side.”

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“Baby girl! I heard about the run in you had with Brock. Are you ok?”

“Hey, Ro. As you can see, I’m in one piece.” I grinned at him. “But, you are just the person I was looking for. I don’t know if you heard, but Rollins issued a challenge to Randy Orton. Ryback’s agreed to partner with him, but he still needs a second partner. You interested?”

“Anything for you, and anything to get back at Rollins.”

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I was more than a bit upset when I collected Seth’s title belt for him after the match, though I should have expected it to go this way. Roman had gotten the victory over Kane, while Seth had scampered away. We’ve got a long ways to go.

^v^v^v^v^v
“Dollface--”

“Don't call me that, Rollins.” We were in the private locker room reserved for him. Being the champion’s manager had its perks and I was enjoying some premium snacks meant for Seth. It was worth the extra time on the treadmill for such decadent treats. It’s not like he ever ate them. Him and his stupid, perfect abs...

“Why don’t you call me ‘Seth’ anymore? And am I fighting tonight?” he asked, ignoring my words. I sighed.

“Does it really matter?” Roman and Dean never questioned me as much as Seth did.

“Yeah. I like the way you say it. Kind of soft and-- And I gotta have a plan in place. I am the Architect, remember?” He raised an eyebrow at me.

“Oh, I am painfully aware of that, Rollins,” I sniped at him, pointedly ignoring what he had said about liking how I said his name. “As far as I know, you do not have a match tonight. If that should change at the last second, I will let you know immediately. Might I suggest that maybe you keep your mouth shut and stay out of trouble?” I smiled as sweetly as I could.

Seth frowned. “You're gonna walk with us to the ring, right? I'm opening up the show with J & J, Big Show and Kane.”

“Do I have to?” It was bad enough that I didn't have Roman or Dean around to protect me if the situation went pear shaped like it did on Monday, but it was worse that I couldn't rely on Seth or any of the Authority members either. As much as I had written it off to my brothers when they asked me about it, I had to admit it had been pretty damn scary and I wasn't looking forward to any more of that.

“N-- I mean, yes. You have to. You have to follow me everywhere unless I say otherwise.” I glared at Seth but he didn't back down. “What? You wanna fight me on this? You scared of the crowd?”

“I'm scared I won't be quick enough to dodge whoever is coming after you,” I replied coldly, giving him a hard look. “My speed is all I have and if Brock had caught me--” I shook my head.

His face went a little pale. “I don't even want to think about what he could have done…”

Seth was quiet for a few moments. “I'm not going to let you get hurt--”

“You abandoned me, Seth,” I said, more bitterly than I intended. I cleared my throat. “I mean… on Monday night, remember? I realize that Brock is someone you can't take lightly, and that your hands were full dealing with him, but you could have at least given me a heads up that you were planning on not going through with the match. I would have put both Stephanie and Heyman on notice, gotten it pushed back.” A thought suddenly dawned on me. “Unless you were trying to provoke him into getting himself suspended,” I said, glaring at him. “If that's the case, then you really should have warned me. Or not asked me to accompany you in the first place!”

I was so angry, I punched him. It did nothing to hurt him, of course, but he looked chagrined. “I thought-- I thought it would go a little… differently…” he said carefully.

“Differently? Are you kidding me?!” I shrieked. “How the fuck did you exp--” Then I remembered myself and took a deep breath before I continued. “You know what, I don't want to know, since it'll probably just make me madder.”
“Dollface, you can trust me to protect you—”

“No,” I said. “I can trust you to be you.”

“What's that supposed to mean?” He was frowning at me.

“It means I'll be watching out for myself. And stop calling me ‘dollface’!”

**********

I walked out with the Authority, minus Stephanie and Hunter, though once we were all in the ring, I stood off to the side. Seth was mouthing off about how great he was for his “perfect plan,” about how he beat Roman and Brock, about how he flew across the country on a private jet to be on the Today Show, and then flew back again to be back for Raw, just in time to be told about his match with Brock. I caught a glimpse of myself on the screen above the ramp. I looked disgruntled. I was, but I shouldn’t be showing it. Carefully, I schooled my features to one of indifference. There had been a news announcement on WWE’s website, a minor blurb, that I would become the manager to the winner of the Wrestlemania match. Anyone who read it knew that I had no choice in being here, but it still stung when a Roman fan lashed out at me on Twitter, saying I had betrayed my brothers just as Seth had. Roman had cut into the kid, who had been stupid enough to tag him in the tweet as well, basically telling him to leave me alone, but I was scared that for every vocal fan, there was two more that thought the same, just didn’t admit to it out loud.

“As far as I’m concerned, Brock Lesner got exactly what he deserved. Just as I did. Not just this championship, but I’ve got my favorite manager back.” He turned to me, smiling. I refrained from slapping that smile right off his face. “Y/N, I wanted to officially welcome you to the Authority. You, me, J & J, Kane, Big Show, Hunter and Stephanie… we’re going to do great things together, just so long as—”

I HEAR VOICES IN MY HEAD, THEY TALK TO ME, THEY UNDERSTAND...

It was a relief when I heard Randy’s music. I didn’t particularly like him, but the crowd certainly did, and any distraction was a good distraction.

“Oh Seth, how quickly you forget… but I don't. I remember everything. Everything. Like how you curb stomped me into the steel steps. How I beat you at Wrestlemania, nearly took your head off with that second RKO.” He grinned, reminding me of his Viper moniker.

I had a pretty good memory too. I remembered how Seth had handed Roman and Dean to Randy on a silver platter. I remembered how Seth had turned on him only four months later, after a three on two handicap match against Dean and John Cena. I also remembered how Randy had retaliated and ended up leaving the Authority. He was a snake, and I did not trust him one single bit. I was going to need to watch out for him.

Randy continued. “I've been owed a rematch for that title since last year's Wrestlemania, so the way I see it, Seth, I'm the next in line for number one contender.” The crowd really liked that.

“Randy, Randy, Randy… Let's not dwell in the past, when the present and the future is right here!” Seth yelled into the microphone. “This is my universe, my WWE. I, and I alone, decide who gets a shot at my championship!”

More like mommy and daddy decide on that, I thought.

Randy laughed. “Oh, Seth. You know that I know that isn't true. You've never done anything alone.”
False. He did a lot on his own before the Shield was formed. First ever NXT Champion, for one.

“...I mean, J & J Security, I get it, they're two little leeches that will attach themselves to whoever holds the most power.” Joey Mercury and Jamie Noble, or as I liked to refer to them, the Jays, did not like that. “And Y/N, she doesn't have a choice from what I've heard. It's either stick with you or leave the company. Good luck with this one, sweetheart.” I gave him a sarcastic smile. He chuckled at that. “Guess you don't have much of a reason to trust me, which is fine. Kane and Big Show, though… that I don't get. I mean, you guys used to be monsters, and now… lapdogs to Stephanie and Hunter. Big Show, at least you won at Wrestlemania, but Kane… were you even there?” Kane's face was stone, but his eyes were on fire. “I mean, you used to be the Big Red Monster! Now you're more like Little Red Riding Hood… what does a Director of Operations even do?”

Kane growled, taking the microphone from Seth. “As Director, I am in charge of running the day to day business, and I feel it would be best if you not only had a match tonight, but a match with none other than the Big Show!” Big Show looked surprised, but nodded his agreement. “And if you win, then maybe I will consider giving you an opportunity at the title.”

Randy grinned at that. I couldn't help but have a Bad Feeling about it all.

**********

Seth, the Jays, Kane and I stood near the announcers’ table as Big Show and Randy’s match was underway. Randy was doing very well against the bigger man, even dragging Big Show across the top rope to apply his “vintage” DDT move.

The rest of the Authority looked worried and I saw Seth whisper to the Jays. “What did you tell them?” I demanded as they scampered off.

“Oh, you know,” Seth said, grinning. “Just a thing or two.”

I was about to argue more when I heard the bell being rung to end the match and turned to see the Jays and Kane stomping on Randy. A win by disqualification...ugh...

Seth got into the ring. “Clear a path! He's mine!”

I jumped in, putting myself between Seth and Randy. “No!” I couldn't let him. Randy was already beaten and I didn't want to see Seth picking the bones of the Authority’s “kill”.

“Dollface, get out of the way,” he growled, glancing to the other members of the Authority. “You're embarrassing me!”

“I. Don't. CARE!” I snarled. “This is a waste of effort to beat a man like this! He's already down for the count!”

“That's not the point! He--” Seth shoved me to the side, sending me flying into Kane, who caught me easily. I turned to see that Randy was pummeling Seth, though the Jays were trying to pull him off.

“Wha-- Did he just--” I mumbled.

“I. Don't. CARE!” I snarled. “This is a waste of effort to beat a man like this! He's already down for the count!”

“That's not the point! He--” Seth shoved me to the side, sending me flying into Kane, who caught me easily. I turned to see that Randy was pummeling Seth, though the Jays were trying to pull him off.

“Wha-- Did he just--” I mumbled.

“Randy was lying in wait,” Kane said. “You merely delayed the inevitable.”

I clenched my jaw in frustration. “Good to know, I guess.” It was strange being this close to the man. Back in the Shield days, Kane had been our foe, but right now, we were technically on the
same team, and I didn’t want to get on his bad side. “Thanks for… catching me,” I muttered. Roman had ordered me to keep my distance when the Shield battled Kane and Daniel Bryan as Team Hell No, after some particularly nasty threats and a few run ins. Kane had threatened bodily harm on me, but thankfully never acted on it, even though he had had a few chances.

“I would advise not getting in the way next time. You never know what the opposition will do. Not sure why you’re out here. You can’t protect yourself.”

“Duly noted,” I said bitterly. ”I was told I didn't have a choice.”

Kane raised an eyebrow at me. “You always have a choice. Defy or comply, in this case.”

I tilted my head as I looked at him. “Suppose you’re right…”

“If you’ll excuse me…” Kane nudged me to the side. I got out of the ring and stood near the announcers’ table, not wanting to get in the way further. Kane chokeslammed Randy, getting him off of Seth. Seth rolled out of the ring towards me.

“Shit… that surprised me,” he muttered. “At least it was just him…”

*FEED! ME! MORE!!* We turned to see Ryback running down the ramp and jumping into the ring to help Randy.

“Oh… snap…” I whispered. I didn’t think the alliance would last more than the one night! Ryback evened the odds as Seth pulled me away from the ring and back up the ramp. “Wait! What about the others?”

“They can take care of themselves. Gotta get you out of there…”

“I can get myself out of here, thank you very much, but shouldn’t you… I don’t know, help them?” I asked. It seemed obvious to me, but Seth looked at me like I had grown an extra head.

“Dollface, that’s their *job*. To protect me, to take the hits, to sacrifice themselves so that I don’t get hurt.”

“But--” That wasn’t how the Shield had operated, it wasn’t how Roman and Dean now operated. *This isn’t the Shield, idiot! This is the Authority! These men are nothing like your brothers.*

Seth was yelling at Randy and Ryback, but I was lost inside my own head by that point.

**********

Back in Kane’s office, Seth was laughing his head off about what a good joke it was to tell Randy he had a shot at the title.

“I wasn’t kidding about that, Seth.” Kane looked incredibly annoyed, but if was at Seth or Randy, I couldn’t tell. Honestly, I was annoyed at both of them.

“Wait, what? No, man, come on… Seriously?”

“Yes. Seriously. Like I told Randy, I am the Director of Operations and I do what is best for business. A match between you and Randy at Extreme Rules would definitely qualify as that.” Seth looked concerned. Kane noticed and snickered. “What’s wrong? Scared you’re going to lose your title?”
“Unlikely,” I said. Seth’s head whipped around to me. “What? You’re better than Randy. I highly doubt you’ll be losing to him.”

He had a funny look on his face for a moment, then turned back to Kane. “Yeah, she’s right. I’m not afraid of losing because I won’t be losing. But are you really buying into all that shit Randy was saying?”

“It’s not ‘shit’ if it’s true,” Kane growled.

Seth made a face, his nose wrinkling in such a cute manner. I had forgotten about that. Then I realized why he was wrinkling it. “This stinks,” he said. I covered my own nose delicately with my hand. It did stink, like someone had taken a massive poop and then let it fester.

“I know you don’t like this, Seth, but—”

“Kane,” I interrupted. “He means, it really does stink in here. Don’t you smell that?”

Seth continued to complain under his breath as he left the office. Kane was sniffing the air tentatively. “What the hell…”

We both heard a toilet flush and turned to the executive washroom. The door opened and Dean came out, holding a newspaper he must have been reading in there. “Kane! Kiddo! Man, this is some fancy setup you’ve got here. Fancy towels, scented soap, you doing alright, kid? You look a little green.”

“Oh my god, light a match, Dee!” I had both hands over my nose now. The smell had gotten worse since he left the door hanging open. He just grinned. I rolled my eyes and headed into the bathroom, my shirt pulled up enough to cover my nose. I found a candle and lit it, as well as sprayed the place with the air freshener available. “Raised in a barn, he was…” I muttered. The bad smell was lessened immensely, but still very much present. I closed the door when I stepped out of the bathroom.

“—facing the man who gave you your Wrestlemania moment by throwing you through a ladder… Luke… Harper…”

Dean stared at Kane, his mouth open, then grinned and smacked Kane playfully with the newspaper. “Ok! Thanks, man!” Dean left with a spring in his step. “Love ya, kiddo!”

I shook my head in his general direction, but was startled when a water bottle exploded on the wall next to me. “GAAAAHHH!” Kane yelled.

Maybe it was because he had helped me earlier, or maybe it was because he was the least smarmy member of the Authority, but I wasn’t scared. I felt bad for him actually. “Sorry about Dean,” I said. “He’s… He marches to the beat of his own drum, you know.”

“Yeah… I know.” Kane ran his fingers over his hair in frustration. I sighed and walked over to him. In the scuffle earlier, he had become disheveled and his button up shirt had come undone. I started buttoning it back up.

“Don’t let him get you down. He’s an ass. And I say that as his loving sister. You just gotta… roll with the punches, so to speak.” I finished with the last button, straightening the fabric as best I could. His tie had been abandoned at the ring, otherwise I would have helped him with that as well. “There. You look more put together now.”

Kane gave me a small, tired smile. “Thanks, Y/N.”
“Oh, jeez…” I watched Dean’s match with trepidation. It was fairly even, both he and Luke being insane idiots that didn’t care about the damage done to them.

“Typical Dean,” Seth said, coming up behind me. “Going into a match without a--”

“Shut. Your. MOUTH,” I snarled. Seth took a step away from me.

“I was just--”

“Shut UP.” I turned and took a huge step so that I was right in front of him, barely an inch between us. “I may have to work for you and accompany you just about everywhere, but don’t you dare try to criticize my brothers when you have long lost the right to do so! Only I get to talk about them like that.”

Seth’s brow was furrowed in concern, “Dollface--’

“Don’t call me that!” I screamed.

“I’ll call you what I like!” he growled back at me. “You are my manager, not theirs! You are stuck with me, whether you like it or not--” He stopped suddenly. His brain was working, that much I could tell, but as to what he was thinking, I had no clue. There was no way he was under the impression that I was happy about this arrangement. “You’ll get used to it,” he said finally, and walked away.

**********

Much later that night in the hotel room I was sharing with Roman, he asked me, “So how’s it going working with Seth?” We were sitting on our respective beds, eating semi-decent Chinese food, and watching a late news program on low volume.

I shrugged. I wanted to tell him, since he would be a sympathetic ear, but I also didn’t want him to worry too much about me. “You know how he is,” I said. “Pretty much the same, except I can’t stand him like I used to.”

Roman snorted a laugh. “Never thought I’d hear you say that. I thought you’d hold a torch for him for the rest of eternity.”

I winced internally, stirring the fried rice that came with my meal. I hated lying to Roman, but my feelings towards Seth were not something I was currently willing to talk about. *I hate him. I hate him! I HATE HIM!* But there was also a much, much smaller voice, deep inside of me, reminding me, *I love him.* “Yeah, well, some things stay the same, and some things change.” Roman smiled, no clue what I really meant.
“Next contender… next contender…”

I looked around the corner of the hallway to see Kane muttering to himself. “Mr. Kane, you ok?” I asked.

“Oh, Y/N, didn’t see you there… You can just call me Kane and yeah, I’m fine, just trying to figure out how we’ll get Seth’s next opponent. I mean, Randy is a contender, but I hate giving him what he wants…”

“I know what you mean,” I said, huffing a little and sitting on one of the storage boxes that were lining the walls. “Besides, there’s plenty of other people just as deserving.”

“Like Roman or Dean?” Kane said, smirking at me. I shrugged, but I grinned back.

“To name a few. I mean, if it had been a triple threat from the start, who’s to say Seth would have won at Wrestlemania? But let’s take my personal feelings out of the equation, and I can say Neville, maybe Stardust, Ryback, maybe even Miz… there’s a lot of talent that could be worthy of a shot at the title. I’m biased when I say Roman and Dean are the most worthy, but I fully admit to this fact.”

“Hate to say it, but I have to agree with you on Roman. Dean… that little shit gets on my last nerve. Sorry…”

I laughed. “Nah, I get it. He gets on a lot of people’s nerves. I just hope you give him a fair chance should it ever come up.”

“I’ll try to be objective, but that’s the most I can promise. So what do you think? As Seth’s manager. How should I determine the next contender?”

“You really want my opinion?”

He shrugged. “I don’t have to take it if I don’t want to.”

“Fair enough. I think either a tournament, because those are always fun, or just a multiple match. Triple threat, fatal four-way, even five… that sort of thing. Something to whittle away the possible contenders to just one and it gives the superstars involved a fair chance. I mean, like I said, there’s more than just one superstar at the moment who deserves a chance.”

Kane looked thoughtful at my words. “I’ll take that into consideration.”

**********

The boos were near deafening as Seth and the Authority opened up Raw. I leaned in the corner of the ring, watching as Seth tried three times to talk and Big Show yelled at the crowd to shut up, but finally he was able to say, “I just want to send some well wishes to Triple H and Stephanie, who are taking a well earned vacation.”

There was a lot more boos from the crowd and a lot of pats on the back inside the ring, and a reminder to everyone that Big Show had also been a winner at Wrestlemania as the last person in
the ring for the second annual Andre the Giant Battle Royal. It was impressive, though if Big Show thought it made him a greater giant than Andre, he had taken a few too many knocks to the head, in my opinion. *Maybe someday, but not right now,* I thought.

Big Show took the mike. “And at the greatest Wrestlemania of all time…” *At least until next year,* I thought, trying to bite back a smile. “We were graced with the gift of a new champion. One with honor… and dignity…” I had to wonder exactly how many hits to the head Big Show had taken if he was describing *Seth* with those words. “Seth Rollins, ladies and gentlemen! Your new WWE Heavyweight Champion!”

*Seth* threw his fists up in the air. “Not just the newest, but also the greatest of all time! The FUTURE of WWE,” he declared proudly. I had to smile at that, but it was just a small one.

Big Show put his hand on Seth’s shoulder. “We must also thank you, Seth, for giving us one of the most epic Wrestlemania moments. A moment that will be remembered, that will be talked about, and most especially, *memorialized* on the WWE Network.”

It was when Seth turned to Kane that things went a little sour. As Randy had pointed out last Thursday, Kane hadn’t had any victories at Wrestlemania. He had been in the Andre The Giant Battle Royal, but he had been eliminated early on, if I remembered correctly, and that had been on the pre-show. I knew he had been there for the main show, but at the time we hadn’t been in the same circle, so I honestly had no idea what he had been up to, besides running things. “Um… Kane was… He was…” Seth struggled to find words. “Dammit… Uh, tell ’em, Kane!” I shook my head as Kane took the microphone from Seth, glaring at him a little.

“Well, you know, for the record, the Authority was successful at Wrestlemania because of the fact that--”

*I HEAR VOICES IN MY HEAD, THEY TALK TO ME, THEY UNDERSTAND…*

I sighed. *This is getting old quickly.* Randy came out, looking as cocky as ever.

“Oh, sorry… Did I interrupt?” he asked. The crowd roared. I rolled my eyes. “I wanted to say congratulations, Seth, on getting your Wrestlemania moment, cashing in your contract… Let’s hear it for Seth Rollins, everyone!” Seth grinned and held up his arms in victory as the crowd booed him. I think I was the only one who noticed the slight tic under his eye. Everyone else in the Authority had their attention on Randy. “But… and I do hate to bring it up…” I did not believe that for one second. “BUT this doesn’t change the fact that at Wrestlemania, I hit you with the most spectacular RKO, possibly of my entire career.”

I had watched their match. It had been an impressive RKO, but calling it the most spectacular might have been pushing it. I might have just been feeling petty though.

“You see, Seth, you can’t change history and history, *my friend,* history says a little over a week ago, *I beat* you. And that means, and correct me if I’m wrong, Mr. Director of Operations, that it would be best for business if it’s me and Seth went one on one at Extreme Rules for the Championship?!” The crowd really went wild at that, and it took a few moments before Randy was able to say, “Or… do you have to call *mommy and daddy* to get their permission first…?” The smug look on Randy’s face was almost too much.

Kane seemed to agree with me. “You listen here,” he snarled into the microphone. “I am the Director of Operations and a member of the Authority! You will respect me if you want any consideration towards the title. I have decided that the next contender will be determined by a triple threat match *tonight,* and the winner will face Seth Rollins at Extreme Rules.”
“Wait… what? For real?” I heard Seth ask.

Kane ignored him and the dumbfounded looks on the Jays and Big Show’s faces. “Those three superstars are Roman Reigns, Ryback, and Randy Orton…” Seth and the Jays immediately started complaining, but I got in between them and Kane.

“Calm down, it’s not like you’re fighting for it tonight. Did you think you wouldn’t have to defend your title or something?” I asked.

“Not against any of those punks, darlin’,” Jamie sniped at me. I glared at him, but Seth pushed Jamie back and away from me.

“It’s what’s best for business,” Kane continued. “Furthermore, each of you will compete in singles matches before the main event, and Randy… your match is next and it’s against me.” He turned to speak to the rest of us in the ring, letting the mike fall to his side.

“You think you know what you’re doing?” Seth yelled at Kane. The Jays were keeping him back and Big Show just looked tired of it all. “You think you know what’s best for business?? You don’t know anything! What are you doing??”

We got Seth out of the ring so that Kane and Randy’s match could start, though he kept yelling as the Jays dragged him up the ramp and backstage. “Oh my god, will you stop complaining?” I hissed at him. “Seriously, you don’t have to defend your title tonight, and if you keep this up, you’re just going to make trouble for yourself!”

“So what?! He’s going off on a total power trip and--”

“And he has the power to make your life miserable if you push him too far!” I yelled. “Look, my job is to protect you, even from yourself, if I have to, and I really feel that you should let this go.” Seth looked disgruntled, but he didn’t argue with that. Not that that meant he was letting it go, because as soon as the match was over, he stomped over to Kane’s office. I was the only one who had the presence of mind to follow him, though I doubt the Jays or Big Show would have been any help. Kane was yelling at some underling when Seth burst in.

“Who the hell do you think you are?” Kane was yelling.

“Who the hell do you think you are?!” Seth said, directing Kane’s attention to him. The underling took the opportunity to flee. “You know what, I am just so sick and tired of you not pulling your weight around here, Kane.” That was news to me. I had always thought Kane was the most helpful when it came to Seth and his position in the Authority. “Why is it that you seem to be the only one who doesn't understand that the priority is to protect me?”

“Rollins…”

“No, dollface. He has to hear this. Everyone gets it, even you, but this guy…”

“Oh, I get it, Seth. If you recall, it was because of my interference and help that you were able to get the Money In The Bank Contract in the first place. So if you think about it, it’s because of me that you’re even champion right now. As Director of Operations, it is not only my job but it is also best for business that you defend your title against a viable contender at Extreme Rules.” Seth was seething at that, the tic under his eye making its presence known. “Unless…” Seth and I both looked up at Kane. “Unless Randy’s right and you’re scared to fight him.”

“I’m not scared of him!” “Don’t be silly.” Seth and I said at the same time.
We looked at each other, and then Seth continued. “I’m not scared of facing anyone for my title. But you know what I’m starting to think is best for business?” His voice had that dangerous edge to it and I knew he was about to say something Extra Stupid.

I grabbed his arm and squeezed it in warning. “Rollins… I think it would be best if you stopped talking right now.”

“No, no,” Kane said, his glare never leaving Seth. “Go ahead, Seth. What do you think would be best?”

“I think it would be best if you were removed from your position as Director of Operations. I think it would be best if Triple H and Stephanie were made aware of your reckless behavior.”

I smacked my hand to my face. It was worse than I had thought it would be. Not as bad as it could have been though. Still bad.

Kane smiled patiently. “Triple H and Stephanie are on a well deserved vacation, on a remote island in the South Pacific, with no cell reception and no internet access. So you’ll have to wait to make your complaints to them. In the meantime, I am in charge whether you like it or not.”

Seth growled and stormed off, only to come right back like a boomerang. I groaned, “Rollins, please don’t--”

“You know what? You know what?” he said. “Triple H and Stephanie will be back, and you will have a lot to answer to.”

“Seth, I appreciate your enthusiasm, but your attitude is bordering on disrespectful. I have to do what I think is best and I think it would be best if you had a match tonight. Wait, even better, you have a match next. I’ll let Y/N find your opponent though. How’s that sound, champ?”

He laughed as he walked off to the showers.

“Next?! Next?! Kane! Get back here!”

“Oh, wow, who could have seen that coming…” I said in a droll tone. “Such a surprise.”

“Shut up. You’re going to fix this. Find me an easy opponent.” Seth was still staring in the direction Kane had left in.

“Why? You mouthed off to Kane and you’re reaping what you sowed. Frankly, I think you got off lightly.” Seth whipped his head around to glare at me. “Fine, fine, I’ll see what I can do.” I put my hands up in surrender and left the office. Now… who would be the best candidate to give Seth a run for his money? I thought with glee.

**********

“I thought I said find me an easy opponent?!” Seth growled at me.

“Did you? I thought you said to find you a decent opponent and I did!” I grinned at Seth, who was not seeing any upside to my choice. “Oh, come on, Rollins. You could have beat him without anyone's help. I know you can, I saw you do it, despite the Jays interference. I just also knew that you’d have had to work for it. The extra Curb Stomp after your victory was overkill though, so I'm deducting points for that. Weren't you going to stop using that move?”

“You’re lucky you’re cute,” he muttered. I almost giggled at how adorable Seth looked from his pouting.
“You’re lucky I keep Roman and Dean from ripping you to shreds. Falsely given compliments will get you nowhere, by the way.”

“It’s not--”

“Oh, shut up. I’m still mad that the Jays had to go and ruin a perfectly decent match. You had him, I know you did, if you had just held on to your temper and kept your arrogance in check.”

I had found the perfect person to go up against Seth for the night, the Man That Gravity Forgot, Neville. He was known for his high flying antics, something Seth used to have as well. I had hoped that it would remind Seth of his old NXT self, back before the Shield had been formed. It hadn’t, and he had ridiculed Neville before the match started. I had checked on Neville before Seth found me, and I wasn't worried that he wouldn't be able bounce back from what Seth had done to him. He thanked me for my concern, and told me that if I ever wanted to arrange a rematch, he was more than ready for it.

“I--”

I put my finger to his lips to stop him. “Don't. I don't want to hear your excuses. I'm going to go see if there's any cupcakes left in catering, and then I'm going to go watch the contenders’ matches. You're welcome to join me, if you want.” I turned on my heel and walked off before he could answer.

**********

Ryback’s match with Luke Harper ended well for Ryback, and not so well for Luke. Randy had won against Kane, so if Roman won his match against Big Show, they would all be entering the main event match on even ground. He found me and got a good luck kiss before going out. He also stole one of my cupcakes.

Big Show was vicious against Roman, but in the end, Roman was victorious. There was a brief intermission as Sheamus “explained” why he returned to WWE as a jerk. I didn't really want to listen since his attack on two guys who thought that Sheamus had their back had set me on edge.

“You ready to rock n’ roll?” Roman asked me. “Can I get another good luck kiss? I want to be sure to go into the match fully stocked.”

I laughed and stood on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek. “You got this, Ro.”

“Of course. I'm gonna get my favorite little sister back.” He winked at me before heading out again.

“Dollface.” I jumped what felt like nearly a mile into the air, then turned to see Seth standing there.

“Jeez, Rollins. You're like a damn cat. So silent… so sneaky…”

He laughed a little, though it sounded a little forced. “Just wanted to tell you I won't be sitting with you to watch the match.”

“Ok. That's fine. I kind of figured…” He wasn't looking at me, but rather at the direction Roman had gone in. “What's on your mind?”

“You still give them good luck kisses?”

You…well, you know what happened.” I shrugged, feeling uncomfortable. Seth nodded stiffly.

“Yeah, I know.”

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Bray Wyatt’s little video sent bad shivers down my spine. He had that “special” quality to seem like he was talking straight to you. “You know who you are…” he whispered.

It was followed by a match between Miz and Mizdow, or what I liked to call the clone wars. Mizdow, formerly known as Damien Sandow, was an interesting person, but he was also a copycat from everything I could tell. It was so strange how Mizdow wanted to copy Miz, and even stranger that the crowd was cheering Mizdow on for it. I shook my head as the match ended with Miz's win by cheating and was more than ready to see Roman kick some ass in his triple threat match.

“Let's go, Y/N,” Seth said, pulling me away from the monitors and guiding me down the hallway.

“But I wanted to watch Roman--”

“Oh, don't worry. You will.”

I found myself standing with the Authority at the top of the ramp leading down to the ring. The triple threat match between Roman, Ryback and Randy was already underway and Seth had claimed he wanted a front row view. Ryback was sent out of the ring and was laying on the floor, dazed. “Why do I have to be out here?” I asked Seth.

“Because I said so.”

“Yeah, no, I'm going backstage.” I turned to leave but he grabbed my wrist and dragged me down to the ring with everyone else. “Let me go, Rollins.”

“No, I want Roman to see-- What are you do--”

I had ducked down, just in time to avoid a flying Roman crashing into the Authority. “You ok, baby girl?” he asked me.

“I'm fine and I am out of here,” I told him. I ran back towards the stage entrance. Big Show attacked Roman, slamming him with not just one but two Knockout Punches. “Roman!”

I ran to his side. He was out cold on the steel ramp. Seth was leaning against the ring, laughing like an idiot, when Randy pulled him into the ring by his hair. Serves you right! The Jays jumped into the ring, attacking Randy but Ryback Shellshocked Jamie into Joey, and they both rolled out of the ring. This gave Randy the opportunity to RKO Ryback and earn the pinfall. Seth wasted no time jumping back into the ring and Curb Stomping Randy, screaming at him that he was the champ.

I can't wait until he realizes that his actions have lead to the very outcome he was trying to prevent, I thought with a wry laugh.

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Smackdown - April 9, 2015

I shook my head as I watched Daniel Bryan speak about Sheamus and Bad News Barrett’s attack on him and Dolph Ziggler the previous week. The two men came out to interrupt Daniel, and to beat him up, but Dolph came out to back him up. “He's not such a bad guy, I guess…” I said to
myself with a smile. Dolph sometimes flirted with me, but he flirted with a lot of the women. I had to admit, I did like the attention even if I knew he wasn't serious and I never had any intention of going out with him if he asked. My personal dating policy was “no wrestlers.” I had my reasons, and only ever considered breaking that policy for one wrestler in particular, but he was unavailable for one reason and then another. Never again would I let someone affect me as Seth had. Plus, I was fairly certain Dolph was still head over heels for his ex-girlfriend, Nikki Bella.

I frowned at the screen as Big Show went out, talking about how he was tired of pipsqueaks thinking they were so great. “If you think you’re going to have some fun without me, the greatest giant to ever grace wrestling, then think again.”

“Lunkheads, the lot of ya…” I muttered, but I sighed with relief as Roman's music signaled his entrance and he went right after Big Show while Daniel and Dolph went after Barrett and Sheamus respectively. They drove the three jerks from the ring.

“Hmmm… I smell a six man tag match coming up,” I heard Kane say behind me. “Should be fun.”

“Yeah… loads,” I said, a small smile gracing my lips.

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“Dollface, do me a favor.”

“No.”

“What do you mean, no?” We were sitting backstage in the Authority’s executive lounge. He didn't have much to do tonight, and I was going over his schedule, as well as answering emails on his behalf.

“I mean, no. I will not do a favor for someone as rude as you.”

“I’m not--” I could practically hear the gears turning in his head. “Dollface?”

“Don’t call me ‘dollface’, and yes?”

“Will you please do me a favor?”

I smiled, keeping my eyes on my tablet. “If I am able to, sure. What do you need?”

“Got a knot in my back. Can you… Would you please work it out for me?” It was amusing to hear him try to be polite and courteous.

“Sure. Take off your shirt and lie on the couch. I’ll go get some oil.” I left to get some oil from the makeup department. I got back to the room, my hand on the door to knock, when I realized I had had a normal conversation with Seth. “Normal” as in, before his betrayal. It was nothing to me to work out the knots and kinks the guys tended to get from their jobs. Years ago, I had taken courses to become a certified massage therapist, even specialized in sports/medical massage, but I really only used the skills on Roman and Dean, and Seth, before his betrayal. I had fallen into old habits and not even realized until it was almost too late. This is wrong… I can’t… I have to tell him no. My resolve was tepid, at best, so I stuffed the small vial of baby oil in my pocket and opened the door to find Seth putting his shirt back on while Stephanie’s voice could be heard coming from the speaker of his phone.

“--and is Y/N there? I’d like to speak to her privately.”
“Yeah, she just walked in. Thanks for the sandwich, dollface.” I gave Seth a look, but he merely shrugged as he handed me the phone.

Once I had the phone off of speaker, I said, “Stephanie. I trust your vacation is going well?”

“Don’t bother with the small talk, Y/N. I have a new rule for you. You can only stay in the executive lounge for ten minutes at a time. Smiley will be informed of this new rule and he WILL enforce it. If you go over the time limit, you will be physically dragged out. Do I make myself clear?”

I frowned. “You do, though I don’t und--”

“Seth needs as few distractions as possible. While you are perfectly capable as his manager, you do make for quite the distraction. Now, be a dear and get the hell out of my lounge. Smiley will drag you out in one minute if you do not.” The line went dead. I stared at the phone for a few seconds, not sure if I should believe Stephanie or not.

“What’s wrong? Get slobber on my phone or something?” Seth asked, taking it from my hand.

I heard the door open and the guard to the lounge, Smiley, walked in, a phone held to his ear. “I have to go,” I said, and grabbed my things.

Seth did a double take. “What? Wait! What about--” I tossed the baby oil at Smiley. “You have got to be kidding me!!”

“Sorry, Rollins, but my brothers need me more than you do at the moment,” I called out to him as I ran out. I didn’t know if it was true, but I also didn’t want to test Smiley’s commitment to the McMahon.

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“You were so great!” I told Roman after his match. He had picked up the win, after his teammates had assisted. Dolph had disabled Sheamus and Daniel had taken out Big Show. Barrett had almost gotten Roman with a Bullhammer, but Roman had gone low and Speared Barrett instead.

“Of course I was, baby girl. It’s me we’re talking about. Man, I am starvin’. Where did you want to go tonight? Dean and Renee wanted to celebrate as well.”

“Well, I was thinking we should all go to--”

“Dollface, I need you to come with me,” Seth interrupted, pulling me back and away from Roman. I saw Dean marching up behind Roman, but Roman stopped him from following us.

“Rollins! At least let me walk on my own power!” He stopped long enough so that I was facing the same direction as him and then continued to pull me along by my wrist. “This better be good, Rollins. I’m starving and we were making dinner plans.”

“I’ll take you to dinner. I just-- You shouldn’t be hanging around them so much. You’re not on the same side as them anymore,” he said, a slight edge to his voice.

I wrenched my arm away from him.

“Dollface--”

“No,” I hissed. “You don’t get to tell me who’s side I’m on. I am not your servant, I am your
manager. A role I was not given a choice in. You *forced* me to leave them, *forced* me to be your manager, *forced* me to join the Authority, the very faction that helped tear my world apart! Never forget that, Rollins. I certainly haven’t. My free time is my own, and I will ‘hang around’ who I want to.”

Seth pushed me against the wall roughly. “I hold your career in my hands, and you’re going to mouth off to me??” he growled.

He talked big, but I could see the slight fear in his eyes. He wasn’t going to hurt me. Not intentionally, anyway. Besides, Kane was right. I had a choice. I *always* have a choice. “No, you don’t. You hold my job in your hands, that’s it. Get me fired if you want, but I’ll still have my brothers, I’ll still have my reputation, and I’ll land on my feet, somewhere.” I laughed a little. It felt *good* to say that out loud. “You hold no power over me, Seth Rollins. Not anymore. If you want me to be your manager, you’re going to have to *respect* me and not try to bully me into doing things for you. I won’t tolerate it.”

“I’m not trying to--” I raised an eyebrow at him. “Ok, *fine*, maybe I was. Can you blame me? You’re always with *them* when you’re *my* g-- manager.” He looked over at the direction Roman and Dean were, but they were not in sight. “You cared about me once…”

It was easier to say the second time around. “Some things stay the same. And some things change.” He let go of me then. His face was difficult to read. “I’ll see you later, Rollins,” I said quietly, walking back to Roman and Dean.
I couldn’t believe it. We were in London. London! I loved it. I had been all touristy and gone to every spot I was able to cram into our free time. I hoped to come back again and visit the rest. Paige had promised to take me to a pub after the show. Roman and Dean wanted in on that.

I wasn’t that interested in the US Open Challenge match between John Cena and Bad News Barrett, but I was excited for the Divas Battle Royal to determine the number one contender to Nicki Bella’s title. Paige and Natalya were in it and I was rooting for both of them. Natalya made it to halfway through the match, but Paige was the one who stood victorious over all the other Divas. I just knew the trip to the pub was going to turn into a long celebration, but I did not expect Naomi to attack Paige in her post-match interview. It was brutal as she threw Paige into the barricades once, twice, and then a third time.

I didn't know Naomi all that well, despite her family connection to Roman, but I had always thought well of her. This was… this was a complete turn of her personality. It made me uncomfortable, reminding me heavily of Seth’s betrayal.

Bray Wyatt appeared on the monitors as Naomi walked up the ramp, and for a moment, I thought he was going to punish her, but it was another weird, seemingly aimless message, this time about how love was blind, how it crippled a person. It was obviously directed at someone, but whoever it was remained a mystery.

I headed over to the medical room as soon as Bray was done yapping. Paige was lying on one of the beds, her arm slung over her eyes.

“Paige? Um, you ok?”

She snorted, but didn't remove her arm from her eyes. She used her other arm to gesture for me to come closer. “Figures this would happen just as I get within reach of the championship again.”

“What'd the trainers say?” I asked.

“That I'm going to be out for a while. That bitch really did a number on me. But I'll be back, and I will make her regret it.” I smiled, having no doubt about that.

“I look forward to it,” I said, “Guess we won't be going to that pub?”

That made her laugh a little. “Oh, we're going. Even if I have to get you to push me in a wheelchair to get there.”

“I would be happy to push you around.” She grinned broadly at that.

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The next thing was Booker T’s interview with Roman. I grinned as I listened to him talk about the match. He reminded me of Goku from Dragon Ball Z, someone who enjoyed the fight purely for the fight’s sake. Not to say that he didn't enjoy the winning, but that was separate. My brother was
made to fight and I loved watching him do it. I frowned as I heard the crowd a mix of boos and cheers. It was something I had been noticing more of lately. The cheers outnumbered the boos, but it was still disconcerting.

Then he switched to the topic of Seth and his cashing in his Money In The Bank contract. “Thing is, I’ve BEATEN Seth before. And I know I can do it again. So, I know I’ll be champion the next time we meet in a title match.”

My smile was back and I made a mental note to hug Roman later.

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Randy was scheduled for a match against Cesaro, and if he won, he would be able to choose a stipulation for his match against Seth at Extreme Rules. Natalya and Tyson had accompanied him to the ring, and Tyson had interfered, pulling Randy’s leg from the ring apron and causing him to fall to the mats. The ref had noticed, but Randy took Tyson out with a Clothesline before the match could be called, a win in Randy’s favor. I was watching with Seth, the Jays and Kane, and when Kane saw that, he left us to do a little interfering of his own.

“Yeah, that’s what I’m talking about,” Jamie said. He turned to me. “Got any problems with that, Miss Manager?” Kane had ordered the match restarted as a two on one handicap match, Cesaro and Tyson against Randy.

I shook my head. “No, it’s a good call, though the ‘two on one’ part is showing more bias than I’m comfortable with. Stipulations on such a high profile match shouldn’t be won on a disqualification like that. If it had been a low blow… I would probably disagree with it, since a low blow is bad enough, but only if the match was restarted immediately. Give a guy some time to recuperate, ya know?”

Jamie scoffed, but didn’t disagree with me. Kane returned and we all watched the match. Tyson and Cesaro put up a good fight, but Randy won in the end, more than earning his stipulation.

“Dollface, do me a favor, please. Go grab my spare wristwraps. I think these ones are due to be retired.” He pointed to the ones on his wrist. I didn’t trust his smile, but he had said please, so I didn’t see any reason why I should stay.

“Yeah, sure. I’ll go right now. Probably going to watch Dean’s match against Adam Rose...”

“That’s fine. Take your time,” Seth said, still smiling. I looked at Kane, but he nodded in agreement. I had a Bad Feeling.

**********

I tossed Seth’s wristwraps from one hand to the other as I watched Dean’s match. It was quick, and he gained the pinfall on Adam, despite Adam’s attempt to run away. I headed back to find Seth, but found Big Show talking to Kane. “--do what needs to be done. Ok?” Big Show said. I kept my distance. I was still angry that Big Show had attacked Roman, and I wasn’t sure I would be able to hold my tongue if I approached at that moment. It wouldn’t do to cause tension in a faction that I was essentially an outsider to.

Kane mumbled something, but I heard the second part loud and clear. “I will do what’s best for business.” Big Show nodded, a grim look on his face, and walked away. Kane stood there, looking more down than I had seen him before.

“Kane?” I asked, alerting him to my presence. “You ok?”
“Y/N… yeah, I’m fine. Just… It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it. Let’s go. Seth’s match is next.” I walked with him, our pace slower than his normal pace. I didn’t mind. Kane seemed really lost inside his head. I nodded hello at Daniel Bryan, who was walking in our direction. He gave me a smile, then glanced at Kane. He seemed to come to a decision and walked in front of us, causing Kane to stop and look at him. “Daniel, I almost didn’t see you there.”

“What are you doing?” Daniel asked. He was staring intensely at the larger man.

“I’m just doing my job. Now, please, go away,” Kane replied calmly. It was so unusual.

“No, no, I can’t– Wait… Did you just say please go away?! That is not the Kane I know. What happened to you, man? The Kane I know, my old tag team partner, he would go out there and Tombstone Seth Rollins into the steel steps!”

“Sorry, say what now?” I asked. “Why would Kane do that?”

Kane grimaced. “I’m in a match against Seth tonight,” he admitted grudgingly.

“What?! Why?? He’s supposed to face Dolph tonight.” I frowned, completely confused, but then I realized. “This is why he asked me to go get his damn wristwraps! He was just getting me out of the room! Probably doesn’t even need these!” I squeezed the cloth, wishing it was Seth's head.

“LEAVE!!” Kane roared, startling me. Kane looked like he was about to murder Daniel, but Daniel didn’t flinch at all.

“Ok,” he said, calm as a cucumber. “But if you have any ounce of pride left in you, don’t be a stooge for the Authority. Be a man. Or a demon.” Daniel turned and left.

Kane was still on edge, his breathing coming hard and fast, his nostrils flared, and his shoulders thrown back in an offense pose.

“Kane…?” I asked cautiously.

“You gonna tell me your opinion too?” he snarled. I took a small step back, and Kane calmed down a bit. “Sorry… I know you, at least, really are just trying to help.”

“Kane… I don’t like this, not one bit. But I won’t tell you to do as you’re told or to defy the Authority. That’s something you have to decide for yourself. Just… whatever your decision is… make sure it’s something you can live with, ok?”

Kane didn’t say anything, and I followed him as we continued to walk.

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Seth and the Jays went out to the ring without us. “I’ll walk with you,” I told him.

“You sure about that?”

“Yeah. Rollins won’t care. Did you make a decision? You don’t have to tell me what it is.” Seth’s
music had just finished and Kane’s was about to start any second.

“Yeah, I did.” He didn’t say more than that.

Seth looked surprised when he saw me with Kane. “Dollface? Something wrong?” he asked me as I followed Kane.

“No, nothing’s wrong. Got your wristwraps right here,” I said, holding up my hands. I had put them on myself, since Seth obviously didn’t need them. “I am upset with you, for the record, so I’m standing in Kane’s corner tonight.”

“You’re standing in his-- But he’s going to lose!” Seth looked completely baffled.

I smiled sweetly at Seth and kept walking. The bell rang, and Kane was still in his corporate suit. Seth removed his shirt and tossed it over to Joey. He was surprised to see Kane removing his jacket. I supposed he expected Kane to really just lie down and allow him to pin him without any convincing to the audience whatsoever. Such an idiot. I climbed onto the apron and took the jacket for him. When I saw he was removing more, I waited patiently to take his tie and shirt for him as well. “Kane?” He looked at me. Kane was so tall, I had to stand on the ring ropes to be able to kiss his cheek. “Good luck, no matter what you decide to do.”

“Thanks, Y/N. Don’t you usually reserve good luck kisses for your brothers?”

“Special occasion. Don’t get used to it,” I said, smiling. He gave me a small smile, then turned away. Kane’s face was completely different from just seconds before. Murderous intent.

I looked over at Seth. He was confused, and a little angry, if the tic under his eye was any indication. I smirked a bit at him. “I. Am. UPSET,” I mouthed to him. He shook his head, glaring at me. The bell rang and I got down from the apron.

Kane was defiant at first, and Seth backed down, gently reminding him that he was supposed to lie down. He couldn’t even look Kane in the eye! Part of me wanted Kane to fight Seth, to put the fear back in him, to make him work for his win, but another part knew that if Kane suddenly unleashed his Demon side, Seth might get broken before his Extreme Rules match. I could see the tension in Kane’s back, then it was gone, and he laid down on the mat. Seth’s tension was gone as well, and he went for the pin. I was a bit disappointed, to be honest.

Then, just as the ref was about to count three, Kane kicked out. Everyone was shocked, Seth most of all. The Jays jumped into the ring, lecturing Kane as he stood up. The Double Chokeslam to them was no surprise for me. Personally, I wished I could see that every day, or even do it to them myself. They rolled out of the ring, coughing and sputtering. Seth was livid.

“Hey! This is my WWE!” he screamed at Kane. “So lie down! Lie the fuck down!”

“Language, Rollins!” I yelled. He gave me a death glare. I made a face at him.

He turned back to Kane, “You! Lay down! Lay down right now--”

Kane caught him in a Chokeslam, and a nasty one at that. Seth was limp on the mat, his head rolling a little from side to side. “Maybe you should have taken him a bit more seriously, Rollins,” I said, leaning on the apron. I think Seth tried to flip me off, but it ended up being more of a weak flop of his arm. “Learn from your mistakes, jerk.”

The crowd was roaring over Kane’s attack, and got even louder as he started to call for the Tombstone. Midway through, he stopped and just stared at Seth. He looked over at me and I
smiled. *Whatever you can live with,* I thought. He nodded, and put his arms down. Kane lay down next to the nearly unconscious Seth, and pulled him on top of himself, just enough for it to count as a pin. The ref counted, one, two, three, and Seth was declared the winner. Kane tossed him aside and rolled out of the ring. I ran around the ring to join him as he walked out.

I didn’t say anything. I wasn’t really certain *what* to say.

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The War of the Clones continued as Miz and Mizdow fought again, this time with Summer Rae at Mizdow’s side and ended in Miz’s loss. *So stupid,* I thought. Ryback and Luke Harper’s match was next, and ended in Ryback’s win by disqualification when Harper pulled the cover off the announcers’ table off and hit Ryback with it. I was mildly surprised when Dean ran out there and started attacking Harper. Dean was one to hold a grudge, and Harper’s attacks on him at Wrestlemania and Smackdown weren’t sitting right with him. *I really hope you know what you’re doing,* Dee. Harper ran, escaping into the crowd.

Dolph went out and started venting about Kane’s decision, calling him “the devil’s favorite dumbass.” A bit harsh, in my opinion, though I did think that Kane could have made Seth work for it a bit more. Dolph called for a open challenge, daring anyone to come out to the ring to fight him. I smiled when I heard Neville’s music begin to play.

“Dollface, you ready to go out to the ring? We’re closing out the show with the Extreme Rules stipulation announcements.”

I looked up at Seth. “I’m still mad at you.”

He shrugged. “This is why I didn’t want you in the room. I knew you’d be mad.”

“I was going to be mad no matter what, I don’t see why--”

“Because you would have talked Kane into keeping the match with Dolph! I needed a guaranteed win--”

I cut him off. “You would have won against Dolph!” I exclaimed. Seth was startled.

“You… You don’t know that,” he said.

“Uh, *yeah,* I do.” He stared at me, so I continued. “Don’t you remember? Rollins, part of my job as a manager is to evaluate other wrestlers. It’s how I was able to contribute to your plans?” It had always been one of my favorite parts of being with the Shield. We’d find some twenty-four hour place, order a bunch of food, and Seth and I strategized as Dean and Roman threw out stupid idea after weird idea, most of which was rejected, but it got us thinking. It had been fun, and I had always felt like I was truly contributing to these men that decided to keep me around. I had felt pretty useless to them most of the time. “And I’ve gotten even better about it since… since *then.*” I didn’t want to say it out loud, but he knew what I meant. “So believe me when I say, you would have beat Dolph, *if you had given it your best effort.*” He frowned. “Oh, but you want to take the easy route? Have Kane just lay there and *let* you pin him. There’s no pride in a win like that.” I shook my head. “You’re better than that, Rollins. You’re better than you give yourself credit for, and I don’t mean all that pomp you display in the ring. I mean, your actual talent surpasses nearly everyone else here. You could have gotten this far if you had just…” *Stayed with your brothers, stayed with ME.* I bowed my head. “Never mind. You’re here now, and I guess you don’t really care how you got here…”
“I care…” he said. “I did what I had to do in order to get here.”

“I know.” I crossed my arms over my chest, suddenly feeling tired and in need of a hug. “I’m going to stay back here, but I’ll be watching on the monitor.”

**********

I nearly snorted water out of my nose when I saw the setup Seth had arranged in the ring. A reclining chair for himself, and two posh chairs for the Jays. All in black, of course, since Seth was practically the living embodiment of the color. I had to admit, he looked damn good in it, but this seemed a bit extreme to me. “Idiot,” I mumbled, cleaning up the spilled water.

Randy came out, mocking Seth and his comfort. Seth just laughed and told Randy to state his stipulation. Randy smiled. I didn’t like that smile. I didn’t trust that smile. He started talking about Seth’s greatest weapon in his arsenal. “It’s not your speed or your strength, and it’s not even your intelligence, despite what you may think. No… it’s your connection to the Authority. Your boys here… your ‘demon’… your mommy and daddy… the only person in the Authority who wouldn’t help you is your little manager, seeing as how she hates you for destroying the Shield--”

Seth sat upright in his recliner suddenly. He hissed something at Randy, something the microphones didn’t pick up, but it looked like he said, “You leave her out of this!”

Randy chuckled and continued, “She’s not that fond of me either, so I’ll be leaving her out of the equation.” Seth grimaced, and leaned back in his chair. He put the smile back on his face, but I could see the tension underneath. “Now… what if you couldn’t get to them, what if Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum here couldn’t help you, what if it was just… you… and me… fighting to see who was truly the better man… So that’s why my stipulation is for us to fight… in a Steel Cage.”

The camera zoomed in on Seth as the smile fell from his face, and regret set in. You did this to yourself when you interfered in the Triple Threat last week! I shook my head, clenching my jaw. It was too late to set that right, but hopefully, Seth would learn from that mistake. I wonder what you’ll choose for your stipulation… you can beat him in a fair fight, Seth, I know you can. Even if that means you're both being unfair.

Seth smiled again, “I’m not afraid of you, Randy. I’m the WWE World Heavyweight Champion! And what are you? What are you WHEN YOU TAKE AWAY THE RKO?” Seth was grinning so broadly, I started to smile a bit too. It was a good move, taking away Randy’s most powerful attack. That’s the Seth I know, I thought.

“So… the RKO is banned in our match,” Randy said, scratching at the back of his head. “Then… I guess I’ll just have to give the WWE Universe what they want before that.” Randy dropped his mike and flipped Seth’s recliner over. The Jays went after him as Seth tumbled backward, but Randy easily knocked them aside to continue to go after Seth. He caught Seth twice but both times he was able to escape thanks to the Jays. Seth yelled at Randy as he retreated up the ramp.

“Yeah, Seth, show him how tough you are by yelling like a kid as you run away. That'll show him,” I muttered.

“He’s not the bravest person when he’s one on one with an adversary. Probably not what you remember of him.” I looked to my left to see Kane standing there.

“No, it's not.” I looked back at the monitor. “It most certainly is not.”

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“Why do I have to be here?” I asked. “Here” being a music store that looked like it had survived both World Wars but no one had bothered to refurbish it either time after or since. Seth, the Jays, and myself had been given the night off. I was mostly certain Kane and Big Show were also given a break, but I hadn't spoken to either. The only reason I knew about the Jays was because of Seth, who was supposed to be thinking about his actions as of late, but that was clearly the last thing on his mind. “Of all the people you could have asked to come with you, you brought me. And you tricked me! Made me think you were dropping me off at the airport…” He had cancelled my ticket and brought me to this place instead. He hadn’t arranged for a hotel room for me, but as soon as I realized what he had done, I texted Roman and let him know I was still in town and would be bunking with him.

“Because Jamie and Joey went home to be with their families, Stephanie and Hunter wouldn't hang out even if they were around, and Big Show’s not into the same things I'm into.” He was thumbing through a row of CDs. I didn't even dare ask about Kane.

“Ok, but why am I here? I don't have the same tastes in music as you either.” Some posters caught my eye. “Ooooooohhh, these are neat.” I started flipping through them. I wasn't a fan of any of the bands I saw, but the poster designs were amazing.

“That's why,” Seth said, grinning at me. “Thought you might find something you'd enjoy. Anyway, there's this place I heard of that's supposed to have some amazing food, and it's all healthy. We should go there next.”

I wanted to argue with him, but my stomach growled a little at the mention of food. “Fine, but you're buying.”

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“Rollins, you don't know how cars work. Quit staring at it and get inside. I called Triple A,” I shouted from the passenger seat. I was already testy from hunger. Now I was also annoyed because Seth was being an idiot.

The rental car was nice, and there shouldn't have been any problems, but here we were, out in the middle of nowhere, miles too far to walk to the nearest point of civilization, and for some reason, the car had sputtered to a stop and refused to turn back on. The sky was getting darker with clouds by the moment and I could smell the rain in the air.

“Just… a few more minutes!” he shouted back. I growled and swung open my door, just as the rain began to fall. It was like the sky had exploded with water. Seth was startled by my appearance next to him and complained as I pulled him by the ear back into the car. By the time I got him back inside the car, we were both soaked through. “I almost had it!”

“No, you didn't, because you can't tell the difference between the oil cap and the radiator cap. Or did you learn since the last time we got stranded?” I looked at him expectantly, but was met with sheepish guilt. Dean was the only one of us who had ever known what to do when this sort of thing happened. “That's what I thought. Look, just… sit here and we'll wait for the tow truck, ok?”

“Fine,” he said, pouting a little. After a few seconds he asked, “Why are we in the back seat?”

“Because there's more room back here. Your legs will get cramped if you stayed in the driver’s seat. But if you want to move to the front, be my guest.” The rain was coming down so hard that it looked like we were underwater. “I'm staying right here.”
Seth grumbled but pulled his headphones out so he could listen to music. I shifted to lean against the door. The sound of the rain and the sporadic rolls of thunder were soothing. I found myself dozing, dreaming of old memories. I could vaguely hear Seth’s music, but I definitely felt the cold. I was shivering before I knew it. My clothes, they’re soaked! Shit. Turning to Seth and pulling out one of his earbuds, I said, “Close your eyes.” I pulled off my shirt and shimmied out of my jeans.

“What the hell are you doing?!” Seth shrieked.

“Trying to not get hypothermia,” I muttered. “I thought I told you to close your eyes?!” Fortunately, I had my bag in the backseat instead of the trunk. I pulled out a t-shirt and the zip up hoodie I had bought at a thrift store ages ago. It had an iron on Shield patch on the hood and was my absolute favorite to wear, simply because it was so comfortable. There were also some yoga pants, thankfully clean, that I was able to find. Once I had the shirt on, I pulled my bra off from under it. “Ok, peep show is over, I seriously need you to close your eyes.”

Seth made a show of closing his eyes and turning away. “So.. uh… you been working out then?”

“Yeah, with Paige and Nattie. Sometimes Rini. Got more muscle now, though I’m still not that strong.” I quickly pulled off my panties and pulled on the yoga pants. My skin was still slightly wet and the backseat wasn’t that much roomier than the front, which made pulling the pants on a bit difficult, but I managed and at least I wasn’t in the drenched clothing anymore.

“Ok, you can turn back,” I said, putting on the hoodie and pulling the hood up over my head..

Seth stared at it. “Hey, I haven’t seen that in a while,” he said.

“Not much reason to wear it, except in the fall or cold places like this. Aren’t you cold?” I asked, hugging myself to try and warm up.

Seth thumped his fist on his chest proudly. “I tend to run hot.” There was stupid joke there, but I didn’t touch that one. Maybe if he was still my friend, I would have.

“Fine, whatever. If you need to change, just let me know so I can avert my eyes.” He opened his mouth, then closed it. “What?” I asked.

He took a few more moments before saying, “If you want to cu-- huddle for heat, I’m ok with that. I’m not cold, but I don’t want you getting sick or anything.” He took his jacket off. “See? Not wet under here.”

Part of me hated him for not getting as soaked as I had, but I was still cold, and Seth was right about his body running at a higher temperature. I think it was because of all the workouts he did. I scooted closer to him, letting him put his arm over my shoulders. “You tell anyone about this, and I will deny it,” I warned him, settling into his side.

“Yeah, yeah, mum’s the word,” he mumbled, putting his earbuds back in. I drifted off to sleep not long after that and didn’t wake up until the tow truck got there. As it turned out, the gas tank was completely empty. Seth had forgotten to fill it before going out on this little excursion. The driver had brought some gasoline, but said it wouldn’t be enough to get us back to civilization, and towed us back to town. I refused to talk to him the entire ride back, I was so angry. Thankfully, Roman and Dean hadn’t gotten back to the hotel yet, so I ordered some pizzas and waited for them in the room.

Chapter End Notes
Used this prompt for the Smackdown part.
“You know, upon further review, you should have thrown him around a lot more before letting him pin you,” I said. Kane looked over at me. We were the only two in the office at the moment, and I may have still been angry at Seth. Kane looked confused. “Last week, your match with Seth,” I reminded him. “You could have thrown him, bashed him, messed with him just enough to prove a point, then, with all of your dignity intact, draped him over you for the pin. You had him at that first surprise slap, so the rest of the match was really at your pace.”

“As fun as that would have been, I would have a lot more to answer to if I had.” Kane sipped his tea. “You're a bit evil when it comes to Seth.”

I shrugged. “Can you blame me? I would never intentionally hurt him, of course. That would be unprofessional, but… I not opposed to seeing him get his comeuppance once in a while, ya know?”

Kane laughed. “Oh, I most certainly can relate to that.”

**********

Randy was running his mouth, talking about how he was going to beat Seth up so badly, even his mom wouldn't recognize him. “You can try, but I somehow doubt it.”

“Dollface! Let's go!” Seth grabbed my hand as he walked past. The Jays were flanking him and I ran into Joey by accident.

“Sorry,” I said. He just shrugged and we kept going. “Rollins, I can walk on my own, you know.”

“Just wanna make sure you don't bolt on me.”

“If I was going to do that, I would tell you to your face first.” He stopped, considered it, then let go of my hand and kept walking. “Jerk…”

“I heard that!” he yelled.

“Good!”

We walked out as Randy finished his rant. “Randy, Randy, Randy… seems like you got an anger issue, buddy,” Seth said in a suspiciously friendly manner.

“You're just now noticing that?” Randy asked with a scornful grin. Seth growled a little at him. “Nah, I don't have an anger problem, I have a Seth Rollins problem.”

“Don't we all?” I said under my breath. Joey snorted, though I couldn't tell if he found it funny or disrespectful.

Randy continued, “And at Extreme Rules, I’m going to do everything in my power to make sure it goes away. Bonus, I get that cute little manager of yours. We’re gonna have some fun, sweetheart.”

I had to bite my cheek to not gag right then and there.

“Ok, so… just to be completely honest, I wasn’t paying a whole lot of attention while you were talking. I think I got the gist of it… I’m a jerk, you’re going to beat me up… and allllllllll of these
losers who you have in the palm of your hand because they’re so jealous of me… they just ate it all up, didn’t they? Is that about right? Does that cover it all?” Seth asked, looking bored. “Randy, let me explain something to you, I play this game of human chess better than anyone else here, or anyone else who has ever been here. Inside of the ring, I can out maneuver anyone. Outside of the ring… Oh, ho, ho... I can out think everyone… This… All of this…” Seth swept his arm across to indicate the entire arena. “I’m the best at it. You don’t believe me, I can tell from that look on your face, and I don’t mean to take anything away from you, but as good as you are… I’m just that much better.” Seth shrugged. “Cage or no cage, Authority or no Authority… It doesn’t matter. Because come Extreme Rules… I’ll be the one walking out of there, still your WWE Heavyweight Champion. And there is nothing you can do about it, so just get it out of your system--”

“Wait a minute, that’s a really good idea, Seth.” Randy looked up at the steel cage that hung above the ring, a reminder for the upcoming PPV, then he started pacing the ring. I looked over at Seth and the Jays, but they seemed just as confused as me. “That’s a really good idea. Get it out of my system, get it out of my system… You know what?! Since you banned the RKO at Extreme Rules, I think I'm going to go backstage and RKO every son of a bitch I see! Get it out of my system, Seth? Your request is granted,” Randy said, grinning madly.

“Nice going, Rollins. Super glad I'm not a boy right now.” I gave Seth a tiny smirk.

Seth was pissed at that.

“And before Raw goes off the air tonight, Seth, I’m going to RKO you into Sunday…” Randy promised. Seth paled a little at that.

**********

Seth didn’t let me stick around for Dean’s match. “Oh, come on… It looks like it’ll be a good one! Dean is completely unhinged for Luke Harper tonight and--”

“And I don’t care. Jamie, Joey, anything?”

“Coast is clear, boss,” Jamie said. The two of them were actually looking like real security guards at the moment, walking ahead of Seth and myself, checking around corners, though I wasn’t sure who Joey was talking to on his earpiece, since Jamie was right there, and not listening.

“Dollface, you’re going to need to stick close to us tonight… Just because he said ‘every son of a bitch’ doesn’t mean he won’t go after you in some other way.” He kept his hand on my elbow as we walked down the hallway.

“Rollins, if Randy messes with me, he’ll regret it immediately, I can promise you that. You, on the other hand--”

“Rowr, rowr, rowr!!!” came from behind us. We all jumped at that, only to turn and see Titus O’Neal and his tag partner, Darien Young, laughing their asses off. “Bit jumpy there, champ? What’s wrong?” Titus asked.

“Hey! What is your problem?” I demanded. “Do that again, and I’ll make sure you and your little tag buddy don’t make it to your next match!”

“Oooohhh, so scary,” Darien said, still laughing. “We’re out of here, come on, Titus.” They were both giggling as they ran away, but the laughter could still be heard.

“Hey, you think this is funny?” I turned to see Seth confronting a stagehand, who had been the source of the laughter. “You know what, maybe I’ll wipe the floor with the next person I see, see
how funny you think *that* is?!” The stagehand cowered and ran off. “Yeah, that’ll show you…” Seth turned and ran smack into Hunter.

“Oh! Hey! Hunter, surprised me there…”

Hunter smiled that false, calculating smile of his. “Seth… you seem a little worried. Boys,” he nodded to the Jays. “Y/N,” he said, looking me up and down. I felt like he was appraising me and found me lacking.

“Nice to see you, Hunter. Stephanie is here as well?” I asked politely.

“No, she’s back at the hotel, still on vacation time. I’m only here for the announcement, then back to join her.” He looked at Seth again. “Anything the matter? It’s like you’re expecting to find an RKO around the corner.”

“What? No! No… I’m not scared of Randy… not worried about him one bit.”

“Good… Wouldn’t want people to see my WWE champion sweat…” The gleam in Hunter’s eye had me on edge.

“We can *handle* Randy,” I said. “Right, Rollins?”

“Wh-- Yeah, I mean, of course. Not a problem. But uh… what about Kane?” Seth asked, leaning in towards Hunter. “You… you saw how he was last week, right? Have you talked to him?”

Hunter grimaced. “Yes, I saw the footage, I have received the messages from both you and him. Between vacation time, meetings for Tough Enough… and letting him cool off a bit, I haven’t had a chance to speak to him. Kind of have my hands full.”

“Right, right, I get it. I trust you, of course. I just… I can’t handle Randy *and* Kane at the same time, that’s all…” Seth mumbled.

“When Kane gets here, we’ll talk. I can delay getting back to the hotel for an hour or so.” Hunter was clearly annoyed by this. I didn’t mention that Kane was already in the building, and quietly texted him to let him know what was up.

“Ok… yeah, that’s good. Uh… what about Randy?” Seth asked in a low voice.

“What about him?” Hunter asked back.

Seth looked at Jamie, and then Joey, and then me. “I could… really use some more security.” I rolled my eyes. *Sorry I’m not built like a linebacker, SETH.* I wondered if Roman would be willing to play bodyguard, but he’d be more likely to let Randy slip by him. *Maybe if he’s just MY bodyguard…*

Hunter was amused. “Seth… It’s *one* guy.” He patted Jamie a little harder than necessary as he walked away.

Seth growled a little. I felt a little bad for him. “Rollins…”

“What?!”

“I know you’re under a lot of pressure right now, but don’t take that tone with me, jerk.” He glowered at me, but mumbled an apology. “Anyway, I’m not bodyguard material… but I can be a scout, ok? I really don’t think Randy will try anything on me, and… I want to help.”
His expression softened. “You do--”

“The champ doesn’t need your help, darlin’,” Jamie interjected, getting in between Seth and me. “He’s got us, and we are more than capable of protecting him. You’d be nothing more than a nuisance, a bother, an annoyance, a--”

“Point taken, Jamie,” I said, scowling. “I’ll go hide like a mouse, out of the way of the ‘big boys’, like a ‘good little woman’ ought to.”

Jamie grinned. “Well, glad to see you seeing reason--”

“Get bent, Jamie,” I snarled before walking off. I was only a little upset that Seth didn’t try to stop me.

**********

Hunter had barely finished making his announcement about Tough Enough returning to the WWE Network when Kane’s music hit the speakers. Oh, crap. This is not going to end well, I thought. It was too much to hope that Seth would stay distracted by his conversation with the Jays, and I soon felt their presence as they joined me at the monitor.

Hunter tried to make a joke about Kane attempting to audition for Tough Enough, but Kane was not to be deterred, and after telling Hunter that he believed Seth was not worth the Authority’s investment, he handed in his two weeks notice. “Oh, shit,” I whispered.

Of course, that wasn't the part Seth paid attention to, and he stomped over to the stage with the Jays in tow. I was quick to follow but not strong enough to physically stop him. I did try. It must have been comical to see.

“Hold the phone, ‘not worth the investment’. Are you kidding me?” Seth said loudly into his microphone. “You know what, boss? I say we let him quit. Who needs a loser like him, certainly not the Authority.”

Hunter looked tired, like a dad who had had enough of the kids’ squabbling. “Seth, this is not the time--”

“That’s real funny, Seth,” Kane said. “You didn't dare call me a loser last week when I had my hand around your throat and chokeslammed you into the mat!”

Seth was livid. “Oh yeah?! And what about what happened right after that?? When you lay down, pulled me on top of you--”

“Phrasing!” I said. Joey definitely laughed at that. Seth shot me a glare and kept going.

“And gave me the win. Huh? Well? You tucked your tail between your legs and performed like the good, little dog you are because you knew what was best for business. You did what you were told because that is what you always do!” Seth screamed, getting into Kane’s personal space.

Kane took that extra step, nearly nose to nose with Seth and screamed back, “And you're just an entitled little punk who's had everything handed to him! The only reason you even have that title around your waist is because we handed it to you! We could have made El Torito the champion if we had wanted to!”

The tic beneath Seth's eye was twitching harder than normal. Ah, this is definitely a sore spot. I moved closer to Seth, and placed my hand on his elbow, trying to comfort him, I suppose. He
jumped a little, since he was now wound so tightly, but didn't shake me off.

Kane wasn't done. “Do you really think things would have gone any differently if we had recruited Dean Ambrose instead of you?!”

That set Seth off. “Oh, really?? Oh, really?!” I was frantically trying to pull Seth away, but again, still not physically strong enough and it must have been funny to see.

It looked like they were going to come to blows but Hunter stepped between them and pushed them apart. “Enough!! I said enough! This is not how we do business.” Seth couldn't look him in the eye. Hunter went to stand beside Kane, but he kept staring Seth down. “There had been none so loyal to the Authority as Kane. That's why, at Extreme Rules, I'm making Kane the Guardian of the Gate for your Steel Cage match with Randy.”

“What?!” Seth screamed.

“Thank you, Triple H,” Kane said. “I won't let you down.”

“No! What?! You're rewarding him after how he behaved?”

Hunter’s voice got low with a dangerous edge to it. “What did I just say, Seth?”

“That you're making him the Gatekeeper for no reason at all!” I wanted to slap him. Idiot!

“Play nice or you'll end up losing your championship!” I hissed at him. He still wasn't budging.

“I would think that you would want to get on the same page as him since I won't be changing my decision,” Hunter growled. Seth looked ready to pop but I elbowed him in the ribs.

He grimaced, but accepted the handshake Kane had offered him, if a bit sulkily.

**********

Seth paced in a hallway, clearly itching for a fight. I almost wished Randy would show up at that moment. Jamie was attempting to calm Seth down, but it really wasn't helping.

Kane rounded the corner, saw us, and stopped. I was the only one that noticed him at that moment. He looked like he was deciding on approaching or not, but then Jamie shouted out, “Kane! Man, come talk some sense into Seth!”

Kane grudgingly approached us. “What's got your panties in a twist, Seth?”

“You, you maniac! I know you have some scheme cooked up--”

“I don't have a ‘scheme’. I'll be playing my part to a tee. No one is getting in or out.” He was staring so hard at Seth, I'm surprised Seth's head didn't catch fire.

“What do you mean--”

“I mean I will be doing exactly as I am supposed to,” Kane snarled. “Protecting the integrity of this match.”

“It's a cage match! Of course no one is getting in or out!” Seth shouted back. “I wanna know what you're gonna do--”

“Hey, hey, hey! You two are going at it already?” Hunter interjected. It was no surprise he had


shown up. With Seth and Kane being as loud as they were, I would have been more surprised to not see him. Both men looked mollified by the boss’s appearance. “Kane, I have known you twenty-some odd years. You are one of the toughest, fiercest men I know, but man, you are a corporate man now. You can’t be bringing the fire and brimstone to work. You have corporate responsibilities. You can’t be the Demon anymore.”

Kane’s upper lip twitched as he spoke. “Oh, yes, I can. And I will prove it to you.”

Kane left. Seth shook his head. “This, this is exactly what I’m talking about…”

Hunter turned to Seth. Any fire and brimstone he had forbidden to Kane seemed to be in his eyes. “And you… it took a lot of people to make you champion. The guy who just left… you should be thanking him since he played such a major part of it. You think having the championship makes you the Man? No, being the Man means going out there and proving it every single night! So… tonight? You’re going out there and you’re going to face Dolph Ziggler, like you were supposed to do last week!” Hunter yelled. I could see the spittle fly from his mouth and hit Seth’s face, but Seth was too contrite to Hunter’s words to notice.

“But… what about Randy threatening to RKO me?” Seth asked quietly.

“Deal with it. But tonight you will show the world what I already know.”

There seemed to be a change in Seth’s countenance. “I won’t just beat Dolph Ziggler, I’ll destroy him,” Seth growled. I rolled my eyes at his melodrama. “And after I’m done with him, everyone will know exactly what I’m about. I’m not just the future and face of WWE, I’m the Man.”

**********

“Hey, sweetheart, looking good.” I turned to see Dolph grinning at me. “Going up against your client later. It would mean the world to me if I got one of those famous good luck kisses of yours. Seeing as how you gave one to Kane in his match with Seth last week.”

I smiled back at him, covering my annoyance at myself for not thinking that action through. “Dolph, I--”

“Oh, shit,” he said, looking past me. I turned to see what had his attention and saw Sheamus completely dominating Zack Ryder on the tv screen nearby. “I gotta go.”

He ran, and I saw on the monitors that he had gone out to the ring to help Zack. “Well, that ‘Kiss Me Arse’ match is going to be interesting…” I said to myself as Sheamus ran away after Dolph caught him in a ZigZag.

**********

“Are you sure you want to do the US Open Challenge? I mean, if you’re doing it to prove a point--”

“Damn right I’m proving a point. Seth isn’t the only one who can get championships for the Authority,” Kane said, wrapping his wrists as he spoke.

“Well, if you go into it with that mindset, you’re not going to get anything from John Cena except an Attitude Adjustment.” I sighed. “But good luck, regardless.”

Kane gave me a curt nod. “Thanks, Y/N.”

**********
I wanted to hit Seth and the Jays every time they laughed at Kane during his match, but if I had, I probably would have bruised my hand from the sheer amount of hits. We were all watching it together and it was frustrating, to say the least. Both because Kane was trying so hard but couldn't pin John, and also because Seth and the Jays were so annoying about it.

I went in search of Kane after. He was walking away from Hunter when I found him. I waited until Hunter was out of sight before calling out to him. “Kane! Wait up!”

He didn't stop, but he did slow down enough for me to catch up.

“You did well.”

“But not good enough,” he growled.

I grabbed his wrist. He stopped in the middle of the hallway. “You did well. And you should be proud of that fact.”

He was still tense, but he gave me a small smile. “Thanks.”

**********

Bray took over the video feed once again as Seth was getting ready for his match against Dolph. I sincerely hoped Dolph had forgotten about his request for a good luck kiss. Giving one to Kane last week had been a one time thing, but I could see now that I should have kept it from everyone else.

I watched Bray, my skin crawling as he described the person he was talking to. Someone who was not motivated by money, power, nor respect. Someone whose fear was their own failure. Several people came to mind, but first and foremost were both of my brothers. Please, don't be talking about Ro or Dee… I wasn't sure how we would deal with something like that.

**********

“Rollins, if you don't get your attitude in check, you are going to have the worst time at Extreme Rules,” I said. Hunter was talking to the Jays in the corner and weren't paying attention to my conversation with Seth.

“I don't know what you mean--”

“Shut it. You know exactly what I mean. This whole thing with Kane. As much as I hate to say it, Hunter’s right. You owe so much to him, and you just keep ragging on him all the time.” I shook my head. “I mean, he literally held the ladder for you to get your contract, made sure no one else was able to stop you. If he hadn't done that, hadn't watched out for you on other occasions, do you really think you would be standing here, right now, as the World Heavyweight Champion?”

“You don't think I'd be champion without him?” Seth demanded.

I rolled my eyes. “Are you deliberately being obtuse? I didn't say that. But you can't forget that the path that you did take, the path that brought you here was heavily traveled with Kane. Everyone knows it, we saw it happen. And now, he's been put in charge of the gate at your cage match with Randy. I don't care how you do it, but you need to make amends with him, because if you don't, he has the power to mess up your match.”

“I--"
Whatever Seth was going to say was lost. The door burst open and Kane marched in, fire in his eyes. “Denture cream!? Depends!?” he shouted.

“Hey hey hey, where did you hear that? That is from a private conversation,” Seth said, getting in front of me.

“Rollins, what is he talking about?” I whispered. “What private conversation?” Seth looked over to Hunter and the Jays. Hunter and Joey looked at Jamie, who took a step back and hid behind Hunter. “Ah, figures… he probably tweeted it.”

“Well,” Hunter said, “Let's just calm down and--”

“You got something to say to me. Say it to my face!” Kane yelled.

“You want me to say it to your face, I'll say it to your face!” Seth yelled back. “I'm sorry!!”

“What?” three other voices said at once, Hunter, Jamie and mine.

“I… I'm sorry, alright?” Seth said, his voice soft, even humble. “I just… I know I owe a lot to you, and I am grateful. It's just this thing with Randy is messing with me and, honestly, it's really embarrassing that you keep bringing up the fact that you helped me… pricks at a man's pride, ya know? But, thank you, really thankful that you've been with me, and… tonight I'm dedicating my match to you.”

“Speaking of your match,” I said, finally finding my voice, “it's up next.”

“I'll see you after, Kane,” Seth said, heading out the door. I followed, along with the Jays.

As we walked along the hall, I felt a peculiar sensation on the back of my neck, like someone was watching us. Whirling around, I stared down the pathway we had just walked.

“Something wrong, darlin’?” Jamie asked, though I could tell he didn't really care.

“I thought… no, nothing's wrong.” I searched the hallway for something, anything, but all I saw was boxes and equipment piled along the walls.

**********

I stood ringside with the Jays for Seth's match with Dolph. Dolph had the audacity to wink at me and blow me a kiss. I just laughed and shook my head at him. It started off fairly well, the match going back and forth evenly, and the Jays weren't interfering at all. I was really getting into it, cheering Seth on. Seth had been knocked back, and Dolph was calling for his Superkick, though he was barely able to stand on his own power, when Sheamus came running down the ramp. He taunted Dolph, distracting him.

“Hey!” I yelled, running around the ring to push Sheamus away. “What the hell!? Get backstage!”

Sheamus just smiled at me and pointed to the ring. I turned to see Seth power bomb Dolph into the turnbuckles, then DDT him into the mat and pin him successfully.

I turned back to Sheamus, “Get out of here! You've done your damage!” The jerk just laughed as he walked away.

I helped Dolph get out of the ring, handing him off to the referee. Seth was grabbing a microphone and started to talk about how he had done what he said he was going to do. “I proved that I am the
Hunter’s music interrupted Seth, and he strode down to the ring with determination. He indicated for me to follow him into the ring. Joey was kind enough to hold the ropes open for me after he held them open for Hunter. Taking the microphone from Seth, he said, “The man who will take down Randy this Sunday, Seth Rollins, ladies and gentlemen!” The crowd went wild with boos, though Seth held his head and the championship title high. “Now I’d like to take a moment--”

Seth took the microphone back from Hunter, shocking him by the looks of it, but Seth either didn’t notice or didn’t care. “Wait, just a minute, I’d like to finish my thought before you continue. I just proved that I’m the man by dismantling Dolph Ziggler, and this Sunday, I will prove it by pinning the Viper to this mat and getting the one, two, three… rendering Kane useless and obsolete as the gatekeeper.”

“Are you kidding me…” I said. “What about all that, ‘I’m sorry!’ and ‘I owe you so much, Kane’ stuff you were saying?”

Seth shrugged and dropped the microphone for a moment. “I only said that to get him to back off.”

I stared at him. “You are such an idiot…”

“Speaking of Kane,” Seth said, ignoring me and turning back to Hunter, “You should really stop--”

Kane’s music came over the speakers and he was walking quickly to the ring. Hunter and the Jays met him halfway up the ramp, trying to convince him to turn around.

“Lower the cage!” Seth yelled at the stagehands. They started scrambling to lower the steel cage around the ring.

“Is this really necessary?” I asked, folding my arms over my chest. “You’re just getting him more riled up.”

“Yes, it’s necessary, and you stay in here. You won’t be in danger.” Seth kept watching Kane as the cage lowered, only relaxing once it was completely down.

“Kane won’t hurt me,” I told him. “I seriously doubt--” The crowd started going crazy, but I couldn’t figure out why. “Uh… That’s not… good…” I muttered.

Seth, just as confused, turned around to face me, and his eyes went wide. He dropped the title and lunged at me, pulling me close to him. I could smell his sweat, feel it seep into the fabric of my clothing. The old me would have been thrilled by this, but right now, I was just in a panic.

“Let me go! What is wrong with you--” He turned me around, still holding onto me, and I saw what had him so jumpy. Randy. He was in the cage with us! “When did he…” Then I realized.

When the cage was lowering, we had both been so focused on Kane, that we had forgotten about Randy’s promise to RKO Seth before Raw went off the air. He must have slipped in at the last second, I thought, feeling useless. “Randy…” I held my hand up, as if that would stop him, “we can talk about this…” I said, trying to open negotiations.

“You’re not the one I want, Y/N, but I will go through you to get to him.” Randy pointed at Seth. “So let her go, and take your RKO like a man.”

“Seth…” I whispered. “Don’t… Don’t listen to him…It’s an empty threat. He won’t actually hurt me…” I was mostly certain of this fact.
Seth pushed me away, sending me flying to the side. He ran in the other direction, trying to escape the cage, but Randy was quicker, grabbing at Seth and throwing him back to the center of the ring. I crawled to the corner, trying to be as small as possible. Seth kicked Randy, and made a break for the ropes, climbing them like a spider-monkey. Randy pulled him down. Seth fought it, used the ropes to attempt a Flying Crossbody, but Randy was ready and caught Seth in the RKO in mid air. It would have been impressive if I hadn’t been so terrified. The crowd went wild as Seth lay on the mat. I crawled over to check on him.

“Rollins?” No answer. “Seth? Are you… Are you dead?” I asked softly. Randy had picked up the championship belt and was holding it up for the crowd. I put my fingers to Seth’s neck to check for a pulse. It was racing.

“Un… fortunately… no,” Seth wheezed. Randy plopped the title on Seth, making him cough a little more.

“See ya on Sunday, sweetheart,” Randy said, winking. “Oh, you too, Y/N.”

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Smackdown - April 23, 2015

Seth stood in the middle of the ring, the Jays flanking him. I was sitting in the corner of the ring, bored and trying not to look like it.

“Well, such a clever, clever boy Randy is!” Seth said. “RKO, one after another after another after another, hashtag RKOuttanowhere! But you know what? I'm glad he got it all out of his system because at Extreme Rules this Sunday, one RKO will cost him the match.” The crowd booed. Seth ignored them. “Now, Kane's been named… something official--”

“Gatekeeper, you jerk!” I said helpfully.

Seth glared at me, but I just smiled back. “Right, gatekeeper. And that's fine. It doesn't matter. Because I don't need anyone's help to beat Randy. I don't need the Authority, I don't need J and J Security, no offense boys, and I especially don't need that overrated, former monster and current has been!”

I stood up at that and walked calmly over to Seth. I stood far enough that the microphone he held wouldn't pick up my voice. “As fun as it is to watch you dig your own grave, might I suggest you stopping this verbal assault and apologizing immediately?”

“Dig my own-- You think I need the help of that jealous freak?!”

“I think you should be nice to your coworkers, especially the ones who have such a big influence on your ma--” Kane's music started and he walked out to the ring. I moved to stand behind Seth with the Jays. “Don’t say I didn’t warn you.”

“Point of fact, Seth,” Kane said, “I am not a former monster, seeing as how I Chokeslammed you to hell not that long ago.” The crowd went nuts over the reminder. “I'm not just a veteran, and I'm not just a corporate executive… I'm the guy who could cost you your title on Sunday.”

“Alright, alright, let’s just cut the crap,” Seth said. “You and I both know that if you’re not on my side, then you’re likely to get fired,” Seth said, impersonating Mr. McMahon. “We also both know that the only reason Hunter gave you this ‘job’ was because he felt sorry for you. He said it
himself, you are not a monster anymore. You are a corporate suit. And just like two weeks ago, when you lay down and let me pin you, you're going to do the right thing, and fall in line just like the rest of us, because we are all part of the same team.” I stifled a laugh. Seth didn’t know the first thing about “falling in line.”

Kane smiled. “Nice, Seth, stealing the catchphrases of the man who signs our checks. Setting that aside, you’re right, I am a suit now, and I will fall in line, like the rest of you.” I suddenly had a hope blossom in my chest and prayed that this was going where I thought it was going. “And, seeing as how we’re all in this together, I was thinking… there’s something you can do for me, as a show of good faith.”

Seth looked adorably befuddled. “Uh, ok…? Sure. What do you want me to do?”

“I mean, since I lay down for you, as you just reminded everyone…” I refrained from clapping my hands with joy. “I was thinking… you could lay down… for me.” Kane looked pointedly at Seth. Seth’s eyebrows went up in surprise, then he started cackling.

“Good one, Kane! Didn’t you know you knew how to make a joke. Me! Laying down for you! That’s just too…” He trailed off when he saw Kane wasn’t laughing with him. “Oh… Oh, you’re serious? Kane, come on now. I’m the WWE World Heavyweight Champion. I don’t lay down for anyone.” The smug look on Seth’s face was about to be wiped off, I just knew it.

Kane grinned. “Not just anyone, Seth. For the man who holds your championship reign in his hands. The man who could open the door to let Randy out, or keep it closed to keep you in…” He turned to face the stage entrance, “Get me a referee out here right now!”

“What?!” Seth exclaimed as a ref came running down the ramp. “No no no, this isn’t… hey, you can’t be serious!”

“Don’t worry,” Kane said reassuringly, though it just made Seth more antsy. “It’s a non-title match. J & J, Y/N, please vacate the ring.” The ref signalled for the bell to be rung. I stepped out without any further prompting, but the Jays were arguing with Kane. “Gentlemen,” Kane growled. “Don’t make me ask again.” They still dawdled. “MOVE!” That got them out of there in a hurry.

“Come on, this isn’t funny,” Seth said. Kane ignored his words, and just kept looking at Seth expectantly. The doubt slowly turned to outrage as Seth realize how serious Kane was being. “No, Kane!” Seth shouted. “I’m not going to do it!”

Kane calmly looked at Seth. I couldn’t help myself. “Just lay down, Rollins,” I called out from my spot outside the ring. “Lay down and think of Iowa!”

Seth shot me a dirty look. “No! What is wrong with you…” I just smiled and shrugged. The corner of his mouth twitched a little, like he wanted to smile but wasn’t able to. He would have found this funny if he hadn’t been in the middle of it. He turned back to Kane, “You cannot be serious about it, Hunter is just one state over, and--”

“Yes, he is, Seth. And since he’s not here, that makes me the Authority tonight.”

More frantic realizations from Seth. “No! I do not want to do this, this is not right!”

“Let me say this in a way you’ll understand…” Kane said softly. “Lie down.” His expression changed to something more monstrous. “Or else I will reach down your throat and rip your spine from your body.”

I covered my mouth with my hands to prevent anyone from seeing how broadly I was smiling. This
was just too good. Especially the way Kane got in Seth’s face and made him cower a little, Seth, very reluctantly, held up his hands in submission, and started to get on the mat. It was obvious to everyone that he didn’t want to test Kane any further, but also that he really didn’t want to do this. Once he was lying in the center of the ring, he said, “Just get it over with already!”

Kane just stood over him, watching him.

“I haven’t got all day!” Seth complained.

Kane broke into a smile, “Get up, you weirdo. I’m just messing with you. Where’s your sense of humor?” I was a little put out by that, but Seth had been suitably humbled by it all, so I wasn’t that upset. Seth grumbled, and took the offered hand from Kane, who helped him to his feet. “Wow, you really were going to do it! That means so much to me, Seth!” Kane looked past Seth to me, his grin getting wider. “I would never intentionally hurt you, Seth. That would be unprofessional.” I grinned back. I was really starting to like Kane. “It’s like you said, we’re both on the same team. It means we’ve always got each other’s back, right?” Seth was pissed, but nodded. “Unfortunately, that sentiment is not shared with your opponent tonight.”

“Wait, what? What oppon--” Seth paused, then grinned. “Oh, I get it, I get it. You’re just messing with me again.”

“Actually, I’m not. Extreme Rules is just days away, and in preparation for that match, I think you need to remember what Extreme means. You’ll be facing your former brother in arms, Dean Ambrose, and that match happens right now.” Dean’s music hit the speakers and the crowd went nuts.

Man, I really have to remember to not piss off Kane, I thought. I couldn’t cheer for Dean as long as the crowd could see me, but I was looking forward to this match. He was halfway down the ramp when the music changed to Luke Harper’s, and the former Wyatt family member came out, making his way over to Dean. Dean was torn, looking back and forth between Seth and Luke, trying to decide which one to go after first. He looked at me at me. I just shrugged, and he decided his match was the priority. Jumping into the ring, Dean went after Seth but the Jays tried to intervene. Luke didn't like being ignored and went after Dean as well. Dean rolled out of the ring.

“Dean!” I hissed, trying to get his attention. “What do you want me to do?”

“Just stay out of the way, kiddo. I got some knuckleheads to pummel.” He jumped back into the ring, shoving everyone else out so that only he and Seth were left. Luke jumped back in almost immediately and pulled Dean off of Seth. I'm pretty sure that Luke didn't actually care about Seth's well being, but Seth looked at Luke like he had a new friend. Or at least a new ally. In a flash, it was four on one, and just as quickly it became four on two as Roman joined the fray. Between my brothers, they sent the others running, especially Seth as he narrowly avoided Roman’s Superman Punch and rolled out the ring to safety. Seth ran to me and pulled me away from the ring and up the ramp.

“Damnit, I can't believe Kane! What was he thinking putting me in a match with Dean?!” he demanded, holding on to where Dean had hit his head. “Like hell I’m going back out there. Dollface, see what you can do about it.”

“Sure, Rollins. Sure.”

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“Your strength is an illusion, just like everything else. I see right through it, I see what drives you,
what motivates you… and it is fear. You can’t help it. It’s ingrained in you, bred right into your DNA, like all mere mortals. And I… I will expose you for the weakling that you are. I will rip that illusion from you and I will take that one thing from you that you cannot live without. Tell me, friend, what use is there… for a butterfly with no wings?” Bray asked. I shuddered, and prayed he was speaking of anyone but Dean or Roman.

Naomi was battling against Natalya, and of course I was rooting for Natalya. My eyes were glued to the monitor in Seth’s private locker room. “Dollface, did you get my match cancelled?” Seth asked behind me. “And stop eating my snacks.”

“No. You don't eat them, so why shouldn't I?”

“That's not the poi-- Whatever, did you get my match cancelled?”

“Oh, um, about that…” I turned around to face Seth. I swear it hadn’t been my doing, but I hadn’t argued against it much either. “Kane said you wouldn't be fighting against Dean anymore--”


I sighed. “I wasn't done. Your singles match was cancelled… so that you could be in a tag match.”

“What?? Bullshit!”

I shook my head. “Kane said you're teaming with Luke Harper, and your opponents will be Dean and Roman.”

“Damnit!! What the hell is wrong with Kane?!?” he growled. He took the candy bar from me and took a huge bite.

“Hey!”

“Wot?” he asked, his mouth full. He made a face and handed the candy bar back to me. “Ugh, this is way too sweet.”

“Jerk… this is my favorite,” I muttered and went back to munching on it while I watched Natalya and Naomi’s match. It ended with Naomi pinning Natalya, but Naomi kept going, beating on Natalya. “Oh, shit…” I ran out of there, ignoring Seth’s questions.

“Nattie!” I called out. She was being helped to medical by a ref. Renee was not far behind. “I got her,” I said, taking over for him.

“Thanks, Y/N,” Natalya said. “I’m ok though, just a little banged up. You?”

I laughed a little. “Nattie, I love you, but that looked like more than ‘a little banged up’. Are you going to be ok?“

“Yeah, I can’t have my work wife skipping out on me,” Renee said, hugging Natalya. “Don’t leave me, Nattie.”

“Aawwww, baby girls, like you’re ever getting rid of me,” she said, flipping her hair and only wincing a little bit before smiling brightly at both of us.
I was not feeling safe as we wandered the backstage hallways. It was poorly lit, and who knew what was lurking back here. “This is like the start of a horror movie,” I pointed out. “Why are we doing this again? Specifically, why did I have to be here for this? You’re just going to strategize with Luke Harper, right? Why couldn’t you meet him in catering or some other brightly lit place.”

“Because I’d have to find him to tell him that, and might as well minimize the amount of time we have to be around him, and you go where I go, remember? You agreed to come.” I grumbled at that. When I had agreed to come with them, I really had been expecting something a lot less creepy, like catering. My stomach grumbled. Also, I was just really hungry. “Besides, you’re the only one fast enough to run for help if Harper decides to eat us.”

“That is not comforting, boss,” Jamie said. “And don’t worry, I have this. Luke’s my cousin.”

“What? How?” Seth asked. I was wondering the same thing.

“His mom married my step-uncle’s son… I think… maybe it was his dad… anyway, the point is, we’re family, and he’ll understand that.”

After a few more twists and turns, we found Luke standing in the middle of a hallway intersection, staring up at the ceiling. I don’t think he was blinking at all. So creepy. “Uh, Rollins, I don’t think we should disturb him—”

“Cousin Luke!” Jamie said happily. “Hey, the boss wants to talk to you about your upcoming match. Tell ’em, boss!”

“What? Oh, right,” Seth said, staring at Luke’s vacant face. “Uh, so just… leave the thinking to me. Hit them hard, and… Jamie, I don’t think he’s listening at all.” Seth waved a hand in front of Luke’s face. “Yeah, he’s not even aware of our presence, is he? Jeez, I can’t believe I have to team with this freak.”

“Be nice, Rollins. Even if he might not be aware of us, it could still seep into his subconscious.” I waved my hand in front of Luke, then snapped my fingers. Nothing. “Wow. Wish I could do that when you talk,” I said, grinning at Seth.

“Hardy har har, you’re sooooo funny,” he replied, laying the sarcasm on. The corner of his mouth was twitching a little. He wanted to laugh, I just knew it. “Let’s just go, this is a waste of—”

Joey grabbed Seth’s arm and gestured for him to wait, then tapped Luke on the shoulder. That brought Luke out of his trance. Joey started miming out actions, basically saying, “You and Seth will be teaming up. Seth does the thinking. You do the hitting. And then you will be victorious—”

Luke grabbed Joey and hefted him like he was nothing. “You broke my concentration! I was imagining all the ways I’m going to hurt Dean and Roman.” He dropped Joey to the ground and turned to Seth. “Just stay out of my way, pretty boy,” he warned him. He eyed all of us, especially Jamie, then walked away.

“Well that went… uh, that went,” I said. Seth shook his head and let out of a deep sigh.

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“Dollface…”

“NO, Rollins. I’m not going out there. Don’t ask me again. And stop calling me that.”

“But…”
I glared at Seth. “Rollins. If I go out there, I will be cheering for Roman and Dean. Do you really want the WWE universe to see me, your manager, cheering for your opponents? Because I get the feeling that would be bad for business.”

Seth muttered something, but then nodded. “Fine.”

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“You’re staying back here?” Kane asked me as Seth and the Jays walked towards gorilla.

“I don’t think it would be a good idea for me to be out there. This… promotion…” I said bitterly, “It’s still too new. I don’t think I can contain my emotions with Rollins going up against my brothers.”

“Hmm… that would be a problem. However, I think you should go out.” Kane straightened his tie in the reflection of a framed jersey that hung on the wall.

“Do you now?” I asked, amused. “And why is that?”

“Well, assuming Seth keeps his championship, he’s likely to go up against your brothers sooner or later. And, the sooner you get used to keeping your emotions about them all to yourself, the sooner you’ll be more effective.” A technician signaled Kane that he was about to start Kane’s music. “Come with me. Follow my lead, and it might just help you.”

Kane’s music started. He walked to the stage entrance, and looked behind at me. I hesitated for a moment, then joined him.

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“Dollface?” Seth asked as Kane and I walked towards the announcement table.

I bit my lip and took a deep breath, calming myself. It’s just like any other match. The fact that it’s against Ro and Dee is inconsequential. You can do this. I gave Seth a tight smile. “Kane convinced me that it would be better for me to be out here. I won’t be in the way. Is that alright?”

“Yeah! Of course, just… you’re not going to cheer for them, are you?”

I shook my head. “No. I won’t. I’ll have to make it up to them later, but…” I looked over at Roman and Dean. They were watching me. I’m sorry, I thought, hoping that they would understand. Roman gave me an understanding nod, and whispered to Dean. He didn’t look happy, but he nodded to me as well. “It’ll be fine. I won’t embarrass you,” I told Seth.

“That’s not… I mean, that’s good. Just stay out of harm’s way.” He took off his shirt and threw it into the crowd. I could see some of the fans fight over it. Next, he handed me the title. “Keep that safe.” I rolled my eyes and saluted him as sarcastically as I could and whispered Aye, aye! much to his delight. He smirked, “Damn straight.”

I sat next to Kane as the match started. Roman and Dean had a fire lit under them, possibly because I was there and in Seth’s corner, but more because they each had a reason for wanting to pummel their opponents. Their blood is running hot the closer we get to Extreme Rules. They just want to fight. I looked towards Kane a lot during the match. He was amazing in the fact that he was so expressionless. I could hear the commentators mention it. “He’s dead inside.” “He’s thinking evil thoughts.” “How could anyone watch this match with so little emotion?” I wondered if they knew Kane at all, considering how long each of them had been with the company. He wasn’t pure evil. He was just a guy, who was dealing with a hardhead named Seth Rollins. I could relate. I did flinch
a few times, when any of them took a particularly hard hit, but I was proud of myself for being nearly as reactionless as Kane.

“You’re doing well, Y/N,” he whispered to me.

Then Dean sent Seth and then Luke flying into the Jays outside the ring. He looked around, down at the splayed bodies on the floor, then climbed to the top of the ropes and jumped onto them as they got up, sending everyone, including himself, to the floor again. Kane stood up as the referee started his countout.

“Stay in your seat,” he said. I was confused, but did as he said. Kane picked up Seth like he was nothing, and threw him back into the ring as the ref got to a five count. He was making sure Seth won by countout, seeing as how Dean, Luke and the Jays were all still on the floor outside the ring. Seth seemed to realize what Kane had done, and raised his arms up in victory, though the ref was still only at seven.

Dean managed to roll into the ring before the ref got to ten, and got to his corner, where Roman tagged him quickly. The referee noticed and marked the tag, but Seth was oblivious. Roman crawled into the ring, and was sitting in the corner, patiently waiting for Seth to turn around, then hit him with a Spear. One, two, three, he picked up the win for him and Dean. I fought to keep the smile off my face, but Dean saw me as he rolled back into the ring to stand with Roman, and grinned at me.

Kane’s face was hard to read. He couldn’t have known Dean would muster up the strength to get back in the ring, nor could he have known Seth wouldn’t notice until it was too late. I knew it wasn’t his fault, that it wasn’t anyone’s fault, but the look on Seth’s face said otherwise.
“I hate Extreme Rules…”

“Don’t be a sourpuss, Extreme Rules is fun!” Dean said, handing me a corndog. We were sitting outside the arena, covertly watching the fans trickle in for the kickoff show.

“You weren’t the one sitting on the sidelines two years in a row, feeling like a weak link to the Shield,” I said, taking a big, angry bite of the corndog. I chewed it aggressively, swallowing it before speaking again, “Last year it was the Shield against Evolution, and I did everything in my power to make sure those jerks couldn’t use me against you. And the year before that… Well, you won the US Championship, which was cool, but Seth and Ro were up against Team Hell No in a freaking Tornado match, which was nerve wracking, I might add, even if they did win the tag titles… and I was just… I hate Extreme Rules…”

“Pfft… this is nothing compared to what I used to do before I came to WWE.”

“Don’t remind me. I still get nightmares from those videos you showed me.” I leaned back in my chair, munching on my corndog thoughtfully. “Seth did those matches, too, didn’t he?”

Dean snorted. “A bit. Not as much as me, of course.”

“That’s ‘cause you’re insane.” Dean grinned at that. “Anyway, should you be eating this close to your match? It’s first once the show starts.”

Dean looked at his corndog, slightly worried, as if the thought hadn’t occurred to him. Then he shrugged and said, “Eh, I’ll live.”

“How bad do you think the damage will be from this?” Renee asked me as we watched Dean and then Luke walk out to the ring. We were sitting in catering, watching the show with some of the Divas on a large monitor.

“Dunno. They really don’t get along and this is a Chicago Street Fight. They both seem to thrive in this sort of match,” I said. “It could get pretty bad.”

Renee groaned. We all watched intently, though none of us expected the fight to literally take to the streets. “Did they just…” Everyone seemed to be confused as Dean took a kendo stick to Luke and chased him to backstage. Luke seemed to be trying to get away from Dean, but when he got into the car someone had left unlocked, which was incredibly suspicious in my opinion, he didn’t take off until Dean had jumped into the SUV. Was this planned?

“So…” Natalya said, “Now what?”

I followed Seth as he marched to Hunter’s office. Dean and Luke’s match couldn’t be over until one of them was pinned inside the ring, and no one had any idea when that would happen. The show would continue on as scheduled. Kane was already there, talking to Hunter, and the tension level went up about a thousand percent once they both took notice of each other. Hunter tried to
calm them. “Listen, I know you two have had your differences, but you *have* to get on the same page tonight. This is Seth’s *first* defense of the title and I need *both* of you to stop being so childish and be goddamn professionals. You got that?”

Both men grimaced and looked at each other. Seth scoffed and said, “I couldn’t agree more, but I’m a little confused. If we’re supposed to be on the same page, then how come this moron threw me right into a Spear just three days ago?? Jeopardizing my safety?!”

“Rollins,” I said. “That wasn’t what he did, and you know it.”

“Do I? Do you? Do you really know that’s not what he was trying to do?” Seth argued. He looked back at Kane.

“I was *trying* to protect you,” Kane snarled. “It’s not my fault—”

“It’s never your fault, is it?!”

“--that you can’t protect yourself!” Kane finished.

“It’s *never* your fault,” Seth repeated, more deliberately this time, “Is it, huh?” I didn’t have to see Seth’s face to know that the vein in his forehead was probably pulsing violently. “When are you going to take some fucking responsibility and own up to what you’ve done?”

“You’ve been acting like a spoiled, ungrateful, punkass bitch ever since you got that title!” Kane’s nostrils flared a little as he spoke. Seth growled and turned away from Kane.

“Settle down, you two,” Hunter warned, putting his hand between them. “Kane, I hate saying this, but… Seth’s right.”

“Ha!” “What?!” Seth and Kane said at the same time.

“Be quiet, Rollins,” I hissed. “He’s too smug for his own good. Kane looked pissed.

“He has a point,” Hunter said, rephrasing his earlier statement. “I mean, you’ve spent a lot of time these past few weeks trying to prove to the world that you’re the same man you were before, and… some things may have fallen through the cracks. I just want to make sure that… that tonight, nothing goes wrong. I don’t want to regret making you the Gatekeeper.”

“I understand the importance of tonight’s match, and I assure you, *all* of you,” Kane said, giving Seth a side glance, “that tonight I will do what is best for business.” He smiled at Hunter, though it didn’t reach his eyes. “You can count on me.”

Hunter patted Seth on the back as we watched Kane walk away. “It’ll be fine,” Hunter said. “He’ll pull through.”

**********

I growled a little at the monitor. The New Day had just stolen the Tag Team Championship, Kofi Kingston had rolled up Cesaro and pinned him, holding him by the tights. It was an illegal move, one that should have rendered the pin null and void, but the referee didn’t see it. I sent a text to Natalya, though I knew she wouldn’t see it until later, to let her know I was here if she needed a friend. I hated watching the tag team matches, but since it was Natalya’s boys, I had promised to.

Renee was scheduled to do an interview with the winner of the tag match, so I headed over there. The only matches I was particularly interested in now were Roman’s, Seth’s, and Dean’s, if he ever
made it back to the arena. There was still the Russian Chain match, and the Divas Title match before Roman’s Last Man Standing match. Once Renee was done with New Day, I figured we could go over to catering and speculate if Dean was going to ever reappear before the night was over. I almost hoped they wouldn’t return until Seth’s match, just because it would disrupt any of Seth’s plans. I wouldn’t hear the end of it if that happened, though, so it was probably for the best that it was unlikely.

The New Day was droning on and on about how great they were, when a car pulled into the backstage area, tires squealing to a stop.

“Oh… shit…” I said, watching Luke Harper tumble out of the back seat. The New Day members tried to help him up, remarking that Luke had been the one driving when he and Dean had left. We all looked up at that moment to see Dean on the roof of the SUV. I pulled Renee away just as Dean did a Flying Crossbody, aimed at Luke, but it took out the New Day instead. Luke had ducked and rolled out of the way, and was now running down the hall. After making sure Renee was ok, I followed Dean as he started chasing Luke again, though I kept a safe distance. I got as far as the gorilla position, where Luke went back out to the ring. Dean was nowhere in sight. I went to the closest monitor, watching carefully.

Luke looked confused. He was frantically searching for Dean, who jumped from who knows where to elbow Luke in the face. Luke was stunned, but stayed on his feet. Dean pulled Luke to the ring, the referee not far behind them, throwing him in and getting into the ring as well. Luke hit Dean, sending him careening backwards, but Dean bounced off the ropes, hitting Luke with Rebound Clothesline. They both went to the mat, rolling out of opposite sides of the ring in synchronization.

It struck me as funny that Dean and Luke were a lot alike. Their clothing style, their attitudes in the ring, their past experiences, though Dean had gone through much harsher matches on the independent scene before getting signed with WWE. The major difference was that Luke was a more rural version of Dean. Or maybe Dean was a more civilized version of Luke? Either way, it made a world of difference.

They both started throwing chairs into the ring. I think there was about twenty chairs in the ring before they both reentered it, throwing blows at each other, attempting to slam the other onto the pile of metal. Dean ate steel first, and lay prone as Luke started to stack chairs on top of him. Luke then went to the top rope, I can only assume he was going to try to do an Elbow Drop or something similar, but Dean got up and grabbed Luke, hoisting him over his shoulders and Powerbombing Luke into the chairs. He pulled Luke back up, and performed Dirty Deeds on him. He pinned him easily, gaining the win.

I sighed with relief. One down, two more to go. This night cannot end soon enough.

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I heard shouting and peeked around the corner to see Lana, looking guilty while Rusev yelled at her. I could only assume it had to do with the fact that she had responded to the cheers she had received during Rusev’s match with John Cena. John had won not long after Rusev got distracted by the cheers and sent Lana backstage. I hated how Rusev treated her, but Lana usually seemed ok with his backwards attitude towards women.

Rusev finished his rant and marched off, leaving Lana behind. She started walking towards me, stopping when she saw me standing there. “Vot are you doin’ here?” she asked coldly.

I pointed to the Authority’s office door behind me. “Waiting. You? What was Rusev yelling
about?"

“Vudn’t you like to know.” She brushed off some imaginary lint from her stylish suit.

“Well, yeah, I would, that’s why I asked,” I said, getting annoyed. She looked at me in surprise, as if she hadn’t considered that I might really be curious. “Lana, we are not rivals. Our clients are not rivals. Not at the moment, anyway.” I wouldn’t put it past Seth to get on Rusev’s bad side at some point. “And even if they were, you don’t have to be wary of me. I don’t do surprise punches, or backstabbing.”

Lana eyed me curiously. “I possibly heard dat about you.” She looked at the office door. “Rusev vants an-uter match vit Cena. Sumting... brutal. Sumting harsh. I vill get it for him.”

I wasn’t surprised. Rusev was a proud man and his losses to John were not something he would just quietly accept. “Like a Last Man Standing match?” I asked, thinking of Roman’s upcoming match.

Lana smiled proudly. “Like an I Quit match.”

“Oh… wow.” That would be interesting.

**********

Seth was in the lounge with the Jays, and after briefly checking on him and saying hi to Smiley, I went in search of my brothers. I found Roman, gave him a quick good luck kiss on his cheek, then wandered around a bit more. Roman’s match had started when I found Dean and Renee sitting in catering.

“Did I miss anything?” I asked, pulling up a chair. Dean slid a plate of barbeque over. It was cold, but still good.

“Not much. Show started pummeling Roman as soon as the bell rang.” Dean was munching on another corndog. I honestly wasn’t sure where he got them from, since I didn’t see any available in the buffet.

It was hard to watch. Big Show kept knocking Roman down, and Roman kept getting back up. Over and over. The power difference was noticeable. One Knockout Punch from Show was like three Superman Punches from Roman. I knew what Roman would say, “Just means I have to punch him four times for every one of his.” I shook my head.

Finally, Roman got a break. Big Show went to the top rope, was about to do a splash on Roman, but he got up and knocked Big Show down, sending Show’s nuts right into the rope. I did not envy him. While he was set up two tables outside the ring, Show regained enough power to fight off Roman when he went to Superplex him, tossing Roman into the ring easily. Show was going for a Spash again, but Roman got up and tossed Big Show, using the bigger man’s own weight against him. This knocked both of them down. The ref started his count. Roman rolled to the ropes and pulled himself up. Show got up on his own power, but I noticed it took a lot more effort than previously. Roman was wearing him down, but would he last long enough to take advantage of it?

Roman got enough steam back to launch not just one, but two Superman Punches at Show. He went for a third, Big Show picked Roman out of the air and tossed him over the ropes, right into the two tables Roman had previously set up. The ref got to the count of six before Roman managed to get up. He fell almost immediately after, causing the ref to restart the count. He used the steel steps to help himself up to his feet. Big Show’s construction efforts on the other side of the ring had the ref
distracted, enough for Roman to rest on the floor for a bit. Big Show had taken the other set of steel steps and placed them next to the announcer’s table. Roman had crawled back into the ring, and was in front of a table he had set up in the corner. Big Show mocked Roman, doing Roman’s usual roar before Spearing someone, but when Big Show went to Spear Roman, Roman dove out of the way and Big Show sent himself through that table.

Both men stumbled to their feet, somehow. Big Show went to the announcer’s table, falling back a few steps to lean on the barricade around the timekeeper’s area. Roman took a running start and Speared him right through the barricade.

“Oh, shit…” Dean whispered. “Bro’s crazier than me…”

“What’s crazy is that they’re not done yet,” I said, shaking my head.

“How are they--” Both men got to their feet. “Shit. You called it.”

“That’s my job,” I said with a laugh. We watched as Kane pushed away from Roman to lean on the announcer’s table. Roman took another running start, launching himself into air for a Superman punch, but Show caught him in midair and hefted him up onto the announcer’s table. He attempted to Choke Slam Roman into the next announcer’s table, but Roman fought out of it, escaping to the floor. Big Show was dazed from the elbows to his head, and didn’t see Roman get a third running start to deliver a huge Spear to Big Show, sending both of them through the Spanish announce table. Roman was the one that got up first. Big Show was having a much, much tougher time.

“Come on, Ro… Just one more push…”

“Big Show looked down to me,” Dean said. Big Show got to one knee. “Or not… Jesus…”

Roman let out a roar, went to the English announce table, lifted it up, and flipped it onto Big Show. “Oh, my… That ought to… Nope, still not quite.” Big Show was stirring under that table. Roman saw it, and climbed on top of the table, his added weight keeping Big Show down. The bell rang as the ref got to the ten count. “And he won…” I said with a sigh of relief. “Thank goodness…”

**********

“Kane, everything ok?” I asked him. Randy had been talking to him, and Kane hadn’t looked happy about it.

“Yeah… it’s fine. Everything’s fine.” Except I knew it wasn’t. Not with the way he was boring holes into the back of Randy’s head.

**********

Seth was doing his walking handstands as I looked on. The amount of strength needed to do that, and to do it as easily as him, it was impressive. I made a mental note to ask Natalya how I could get strong enough to do that.

“You gonna walk out with me?” he asked once he was right side up again.

“I wasn’t sure you’d want me out there. The Jays aren’t walking with you.” I handed him his water bottle. He took a swig, then handed it back and bent over so that I could douse his head in the water.

“Yeah, but that’s different. You’re not like them.”

“Thank goodness,” I said with a wry laugh. “Do you want me out there?”
He shrugged. “Would be nice. When you were cheering for me in my match against Dolph…” He fell silent as he looked for the words he needed. “I just… think it would be good for you to be out there.”

“You want a cheering section?” I asked, slightly amused. Seth scowled at me. “Well, I guess I can spare the time for it. Want me to bring some pompoms?” He made a weird face at that. “Guess not. Come on, Rollins. Let’s get this over with.”

I stood next to him, waiting for the music to start. Randy had already gone out and the crowd was cheering loudly for him. Seth was antsy.

I touched his hand, the one not holding onto the title, “Calm down. You got this.”

“What makes you so sure?”

“You’ve stacked the deck as well as you can, right? Minus the whole Kane thing, which I still say was stupid. But he won’t be a factor if you pin Randy or climb out.” I sighed. “Just… go out there and beat that asshole.”

“You make it sound so easy.”

“Eh, I’ve seen you overcome worse odds.” Seth’s music started, and I let go of his hand. “Ready when you are.”

**********

I stood near the door of the steel cage with Kane as Randy and Seth were introduced. The referee held the title aloft, and then handed it to me through the gap in the cage. The bell rang and Seth made a dash for the cage wall. Randy pulled him down easily, and they began exchanging blows. I hoped it was just my imagination, but Seth seemed to be moving a little slower than usual.

“Surprised you’re out here,” Kane said to me.

“Why’s that?” I asked, wincing as Randy got in a particularly harsh punch.

“Thought you were mad at him.”

“Mad at Rollins? Not at the moment. Give it time,” I said, grinning. Seth sent Randy flying backwards, then turned to the door.

“Open it!” he demanded. I stepped out of the way as Kane climbed the steps to unlock the gate. Seth almost made it through the ropes before Randy pulled him back in and Kane was forced to close the door.

“So… you’re… friends again?” Kane asked.

“Not in the slightest.”

“Then why are you being so chipper right now?” Seth went crashing into the cage wall. Randy rolled him up for a pin, but Seth kicked out easily.

“Well, both my brothers won their matches earlier, and that put me in a good mood.” Seth was trying to escape up the other side of the cage after Randy sent him flying up and into it. “Rollins will probably spoil it at some point.”

Seth reversed the hold Randy had on him, and pushed him into the cage wall. He proceeded to kick
Randy’s side, then tried again to escape, but Randy jumped up on the ropes and hit Seth over and over until they both went down to the mat. Seth knocked Randy down, punching him in the head repeatedly, then went for the cover, but Randy kicked out at the two count.

Seth rolled away, frustrated. “Hey!” He turned to me. “Calm yourself. Wear him out. Take your time and then take him down.” Seth nodded, though I’m not certain he heard me, considering how he did exactly the opposite of what I said. He went full force at Randy, which kept him down for a little bit, and allowed Seth to mock Kane.

“I can do this all on my own. Don’t need your help, Kane,” Seth said, right before Randy came up behind him and dragged him to the middle of the ring for a beatdown.

“See what I mean? Totally bringing down my good mood,” I said, shaking my head. “I should have stayed backstage…”

Kane snorted. “You can still go back. Oh, he’s trying to escape again.”

Randy pulled him down from the cage climb, and began running over Seth. It was painful to watch. Randy was not going easy on him at all, even ignored two chances to escape the cage just to beat Seth up. Seth got lucky, fired off an Enziguri Kick to Randy’s neck, knocking him down. Both men were hurt and it took them a few moments to get back up. A brawl started between them in the middle of the ring. Randy sent Seth flying into the ropes, but instead of bouncing off, Seth held on, then started climbing the cage. Randy took a moment to notice, and it was enough time for Seth to climb to the top of the cage. He started running for Seth.

“Come, Seth!” I screamed. “MOVE!” But Randy caught him. They began exchanging blows while they both sat on the top of the cage.

“Seth has been moving slowly all of the match,” Kane commented.

I had really hoped it was just my paranoid imagination. “I know… he didn’t say anything beforehand. Otherwise I would have done something.”

Randy pulled Seth down from the top of the cage, the two of them balancing precariously on the top rope of the ring. Randy grabbed Seth and Power Slammed him from that rope. Seth kicked out of the pin, thankfully, and rolled to the side. Randy was in disbelief, and even asked the ref for a confirmation. He went after Seth again, but this time, Seth was lying in wait, and kicked the crap out of Randy’s head from his position on the mat. He got up, kicked Randy a few more times, then started climbing the cage again. He got up to the top of the cage, using the top rope to bounce up and almost over, when Randy got up. Like a flash, Randy was up on the top rope, pulling Seth’s leg, but Seth pushed him away long enough to get over the top. All he had to do was jump down and that would be it.

“Jump, please, jump…” I whispered.

Then Randy, the vile snake, grabbed Seth by the hair. The Jays, out of thin air, appeared and were trying to help Seth, but Randy had a good grip. Seth was yelling in pain, and ended up climbing back up to the top of the cage, just to relieve the pain. Randy adjusted his grip and Superplexed him from the top of the cage. Randy rolled into the cover, but it wasn’t as strong as it should have been and Seth kicked out.

The Jays hurried over to Kane and me. “It’s time. Open the door.”

“You have got to be kidding me…” I said, looking at them in disgust.
“We’re on the same page for this one,” Kane said. “Get away from the door,” he growled at the Jays, making them back up.

That didn’t stop them from wanting to help Seth, and they went to opposite sides of the cage to crawl up the fencing. I suppose they figured Randy couldn’t deal with both of them at once, but none of us expected him to pick Seth up and throw him at the cage where the Jays were each climbing. Jamie and then Joey were both knocked to the ground, and Seth was slammed into the cage wall a third time for good measure before supplexing him into the mat. He was going for that Vintage move, but Seth fought out of it, and sent Randy into the space between the ropes and the cage. Both men used the time to recharge, and Seth was up first, scrambling to climb out.

“Hurry, Rollins!” I shouted, running over to the side he was trying to escape from, “He’s right behin--” Randy swept Seth’s legs out from under him, sending him down onto the ropes.

“Fuck!!” he screamed.

“Wow, right in the babymaker,” I said with a wince. Seth doubled over, completely spent. “Rollins? Are you dead now?”

“Fuck… I wish I was…” he wheezed.

“Oh, shit, get up! Or at least roll off the ropes, Randy’s not going to try for the door, he’s coming back!” But it was too late. Randy grabbed Seth and went for the Vintage Orton from the top rope, a DDT face first right into the mat for Seth. Randy didn’t pin him, however, and started parading around the ring. Normally, he did this right before applying the RKO, but since it was banned, I could only assume he was pumping himself up to simply pin Seth after another of his signature moves. “Get up, Rollins!” I screamed.

Seth wobbled to his feet, but Randy had him, and put him into… “The Pedigree?!” Michael Cole yelled from the announcer’s table. He was so loud, I could hear him from where I stood. Randy slammed Seth into the mat, then rolled him over into a pin.

“Rollins!!” Nothing. I ran around the cage, trying to get as close as I could. The ref began his count, the crowd chanting along.

One!

“ Fucking hell-- ROLLINS!!” He twitched a little at that one.

Two!

“SETH!!” He kicked out, but just barely. He certainly wasn’t able to figure out where he was. He rolled closer to the cage door, and I moved accordingly. “Over here, follow my voice!” He looked dazed as he crawled towards the ropes, hanging onto them like his life depended on it. I smacked my hand against the chain fence. “Come on, Rollins, snap out of it! Randy’s right there…” Randy was standing over Seth, looking down at him, an evil smile on his stupid, smug face. He backed up into the opposite corner, leaning into the turnbuckles, waiting for Seth to get up. “Shit… Rollins, he’s going for the Running Punt.”

“T-tell me…”

“What?”

“When… tell me… when…” Seth wheezed.
“Sure… yeah. I can do that.” I looked up at Randy. Seth was on his hands and knees. Randy grinned wider, and started running. “Now!” Seth spun on his knees, barely missing being kicked in the head, and Randy kicked the ropes hard. The backlash sent him to the mat, making him grip his now pained ankle. Seth was getting to his feet, though he was definitely not steady on them, and even fell back to his knees, crawling towards us.

“The door! O-open the door!” he yelled at Kane. Kane looked annoyed, but he went to the door to open it. Too bad Randy wasn’t completely done in by that kick. He was able to pull Seth back to the center of the ring and into a Backbreaker. The door was still open. Randy looked over, and marched straight for it. I wanted to shut that door in his face, but it wasn’t my place to do so. Only the gatekeeper could do that, and he was only supposed to keep people out and open the door for the competitors. But would Kane? I looked over to him, not moving. I somehow doubted it, until Randy’s leg was between the ropes and Kane shut the door on him. It didn’t hurt him physically, but I could see the betrayal on his face.

“Kane?” I asked, not sure of where his head was at.

“It’s what’s best for business,” he growled, more at Randy than me. I wondered if this had something to do with that conversation they had had earlier.

“What are you doing, man?” Randy yelled. “Open the door!”

“No! Get back!” Kane yelled back.

“Come on! Open the door!” They argued, but Kane was steadfast in holding the door shut.

I wasn’t paying attention to Seth at that moment, or else I would have grabbed the door to help Kane, or at least warned him that Seth was running towards them both. He jumped for a Drop Kick, but Randy dodged out of the way and Seth went flying into the door, kicking it and Kane. Kane fell off the stairs and onto the floor.

“Kane!” I screamed. I looked back at the two men in the ring. Both were shocked and looked at each other in confusion. Then they both scrambled for the door. It was a literal race to see who could touch the floor first, and therefore win the championship. Seth was half hanging from the ring, trying to escape, while Randy was pulling him back in, trying to climb over him. Neither of them expected Kane to get up and slam the door shut on their heads. Both men slumped backward into the ring. “Oh, shit…”

Kane had lost it. He was abandoning his jacket, pulling his tie off, and that look in his eyes… it chilled me to the bone. The Jays were trying to calm him down, but they were just annoying him. He pushed them out of the way and stomped up the steel steps.

“Kane! Please don’t do this!” I begged. He merely snorted in my direction and kept going. The Jays weren’t far behind, screaming at him, demanding to know what he was doing. They got in between him and Seth, but by then, he had had enough of them and Double Choke Slammed them into the mat. He turned to Seth next, his hand poised to Choke Slam him. “Kane! Stop!! Please! You have to stop!!” I ran around the cage, not daring to enter it. “Kane!!”

I could hear Seth begging, “No… don’t… no…”

Kane’s fingers wiggled, anticipating his infamous move. “Kane…” I said. I was right next to them, on the outside of the cage. “Please. Don’t do it.” The crowd was chanting for it, Yes! Yes! Yes!

He struggled with his decision, and then his hand came down fast, wrapping around the throat of
Randy, who had been mere inches away from Seth. Seth rolled towards me, reaching out, but I kept my eyes on Kane as he lifted Randy up and Choke Slammed him down with a painful thud. Seth was crawling around the edge of the ring towards the door. I kept pace with him on the outside, trying to encourage him. He was almost there, his hand reaching through the ropes and onto the steps, but Kane pulled him back in by his ankles, got him back on his feet and wrapped his hand around Seth’s throat.

“Kane!” I screamed, my fingers gripping the chain fence hard enough that I was cutting off circulation. “Kane, don’t!” But he flat out ignored me. Seth bounced off the mat as Kane Choke Slammed him. “Oh... shit…” I said softly. Both Seth and Randy were lying lifeless in the ring. Jamie and Joey weren’t much better, but I could hear groans from Jamie. Kane looked at Randy, then Seth, and then dragged Seth over Randy.

“Start the damn count!” he told the ref, walking back towards the cage door.

“One…” I whispered, “Two… fuck!” Randy had somehow kicked out! I looked at Kane, who was turning an alarming shade of red. He stomped over to Randy, who had gotten to his feet, attempted to Power Slam him, but Randy fought out of it and RKO’ed Kane. Seth had gotten up as well, but Randy hadn’t noticed just yet. He turned, and Seth delivered Randy’s own move to him, the RKO, sending Randy to slumberland. Seth rolled towards the door, looking back at the other two men. “Seth!” He turned to me. “Quit wasting time and get out here!”

Seth scrambled to the door, pulling himself out by the ropes and the cage frame. I held my arms out to him, helping him with what little strength I had. He fell on top of me, his chest heaving. The entire arena erupted in sound, but if it was boos or cheers, I honestly couldn’t tell you.

“I won?” Seth asked.

“Yes, you won,” I told him, holding him up as best I could, helping him to his feet. The referee on the outside of the cage handed him his title back.

“Fuck… I nearly lost…”

“But you didn’t,” I reminded him. We started walking to the back. “You won. This is your proof.” I patted the title in his hands. I looked over at the men still in the ring. Jamie and Joey had gotten to their feet and were jogging to join us.

“You’re right…” he said, “You’re right.” Tears were slipping out of his eyes. “You’re right…” He kept repeating it as we walked.

“Shhh, Rollins… It’s alright. You did well,” I whispered.

“Y/N…” he said, looking me in the eyes.

He looked so vulnerable. It was in that moment, as I held Seth up, that I knew. I couldn’t leave him to the Authority. He was better than this, better than them. They had taken away his spine, his courage, his “I can do anything” spirit. I would bring him back, if I could. I would at least try to do so. I would try and bring him back home. I was in the unique position to do that. My purpose as his manager was renewed, but my position was on rocky ground. Seth could decide at any moment that I wasn’t worth having around, and while it was something I had come to terms with, had hoped that it would happen, now I had to be careful. I had once said I would make him a better champion even if it killed him, but it had been out of spite, not because I wanted it to happen. It was different now. I was different now from how I had once been.
“I hate Extreme Rules…” I muttered, cursing myself for falling back to where I did not want to be. At least I would still have to kill him to make him a better superstar.

^v^v^v^v^v

Raw - April 27, 2015

“Man, I can’t believe it,” Dean said. “King Ambrose. That has a nice ring to it, don’t you think?”

I laughed. “It does. But you gotta win the tournament first. Don’t go jinxing yourself.” Dean was entered in the King of the Ring Tournament, and his first match was scheduled to be against Sheamus.

“Nah, I got this in the bag.” He winked at me and sauntered off.

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Seth, the Jays, Kane, and I opened the show to an array of boos. Seth wasn’t bothered by it at all as he began talking.

“Finally, Randy Orton knows what the rest of the WWE Universe knows. That you cannot outsmart Seth Rollins!” So many boos for that. “Need I remind you, I am the man that singlehandedly built up the most dominant faction and was also the man who singlehandedly destroyed it?”

I looked away. “Still too fresh?” Kane asked. I nodded. “Don’t let them see you squirm.” I tried, I really did. I focused on Seth’s back, on how wet his shirt was from putting water in his hair. It helped a little.

“Let’s not forget that I am also the man who cashed in his Money In The Bank Contract at Wrestlemania and beat not only Roman Reigns, but also the Beast, Brock Lesner.”

“After they had exhausted themselves against each other, and it’s not like you pinned Brock,” I muttered.

“Last night was one of the best nights of my life! Not only did I beat Randy, I beat him using his own move against him! Well, just take a look!” The screen above the stage entrance showed stills of the cage match. I noticed how selective the photos were, showing only Seth and Randy, and none of the other men who had been in the ring at the end of the match, except where it couldn’t be helped. “That’s right, I beat Randy Orton with an SKO, a Seth KO! See what I did there? Aaaaaaand, I beat him all on my own.” Kane and I exchanged a look at that.

“Jeebus, he has a short memory span. Exactly how hard did you slam him into the mat?” I whispered to Kane, attempting to deflect my own morose feelings with a joke. He snorted a laugh.

“Not hard enough. He’s delusional all on his own.”

“So it seems.”

“But… a general is only as good as his soldiers, so I’d like to take a moment to thank Kane.” Seth turned to us. Kane gave a small smile. “Kane, the best cryptkeeper one could ask for.”

We all stopped at that one, though Seth’s shock at his words was clearly an act.

“I am so sorry, I don’t know why I said that,” he said, chuckling. “I mean… the Cryptkeeper? You
have nothing in common with him. An old relic from the nineteen-nineties, that no one cares about and you’re… you’re Kane! You’re the gatekeeper. You kept the best gates, and you’re the gatekeeper of all gatekeepers, and--”

“Are you done yet?” I asked. Such disrespect, it wasn’t even funny, despite how much the Jays were giggling.

“Almost. You kept the gates so good, while more talented people did the things in the ring. No idea how I would confuse the two.” Seth kept grinning.

“Such a jerk,” I muttered.

Kane waved it off. “No offense taken, Seth. As a matter of fact, I was thinking that if it hadn’t been for my actions as gatekeeper, and your illegal use of the RKO…”

“Wait, what?” I asked. “That’s not right.”

Kane just smiled at me. “If it wasn’t for those things, Randy Orton would be champion right now. And instead of coming out here to boast and brag, you’d be point fingers while you cry and complain like the spoiled little brat I know you are.”

“That’s a little harsh…” Though I knew he wasn’t wrong.

“You see, Seth, I’d rather be the WWE version of the Cryptkeeper, than the WWE version of Justin Bie-BER.”

“Oh, snap…” I looked at Seth. He was not pleased by that. It really didn’t help that the crowd caught on to that and started chanting Justin Bieber! clap clap clap

Seth forced a laugh out, then yelled, “You’re just jealous of me, Kane! Because I have this title. I have the entourage. I have the awesome manager. I get to go home every night, and know that I am the MAN! While you should just go home!”

“I’m jealous?” Kane asked incredulously. “You’re just scared because it took six men to help you get that championship!”

“Boys!” I shouted, getting in between them and attempting to push them apart.

“I am not scared! I could wrestle circles around you if --”

Randy’s music played over the speakers, interrupting the argument. “Oh thank god…” I muttered.

“Fellas…” Randy started. “I’m not usually the kind of guy to come out here and complain about someone cheating to win, but by your own man’s admission, Seth cheated me out of victory, and I think that that earns me a rematch.”

“Hey!” I said, grabbing Seth’s microphone. “He did not cheat. The stipulation was that your RKO would be taken away. The fact that Rollins used it is irrelevant.”

“Keep telling yourself that, sweetheart,” Randy said, winking at me. I growled at him, but Seth had taken back the microphone from me.

“That is not what Kane said, and you know what? This isn’t the Kane regime, this isn’t the Randy regime, this is my time. This is the Rollins regime. And as long as I’m champion, you only get one crack at the title, and you squandered it last night.”
Randy laughed. “Shut up, Catwoman, I ain’t talking to you. I’m talking to Kane.” Seth was ready to murder Randy, and I had to physically block him from heading straight out of the ring and up the ramp to where Randy stood.

“Rollins, do not provoke anyone right now,” I warned him.

“But…”

Kane spoke up. “I hate to say it, but Randy does have a point—”

*Dun nuh. Dun nuh!* Roman’s music played as he descended from the crowd. “Oh, boy…” I could guess as to why Roman was here.

He climbed over the barricade, grinning at me, and then went to the announcers table and climbed on top of it, holding his fists up to the cheers of the crowd. Seth put his arm around my shoulders possessively.

“Oh, get over yourself, Roman!” Seth yelled. “What do you want? What’s your business out here?!”

Someone handed Roman a microphone. “If you shut the hell up for a minute, I'll tell you,” he said, still grinning. “In case you hadn’t noticed, you’re missing a giant tonight.” Big Show had been ordered to bed rest and hadn’t fought that order. It was indicative of how bad off he was from the previous night’s match. “Guess that makes me the Last Man Standing. No offense to you, Randy, but you had your shot.”

I looked over to Randy, who blew a kiss. Not to me. Not to Roman either, I think. He was looking off to the side. I searched the crowd while Roman continued to talk, and noticed one woman who had her eyes on Randy, while everyone else was paying attention to Roman. *Interesting...* I hadn’t heard that Randy was seeing anyone, but I also didn’t pay much attention to that sort of thing if it was outside of work, since it was only the office romances that caused trouble.

“--one of you deserve a shot at my title!” Seth was screaming.

“Actually...I have to admit,” Kane was saying, “They both make compelling arguments.”

“What?!” Seth shrieked.

“So I’m going to do what’s best for business. Tonight, you and I will set aside our differences and show these two the real power behind the Authority!”

Seth looked confused. “Uh, are you... are you talking about a tag team match?”

“Yes, I’m talking about a tag team match.” Kane looked annoyed, but Seth looked pleased with himself. It was pretty funny and a little adorable. “Tell you what,” Kane continued, “by the end of the night, the WWE Universe will have decided who gets the title match.”

The crowd drowned out Seth’s frustrated yelling as they proceeded to go nuts over the announcement.

**********

The first match of the tournament was Dolph versus Bad News Barrett. He lost after Sheamus came out as a distraction, allowing Barrett to pick up the win.
As bad as I felt for Ryback, I also breathed a sigh of relief when Bray Wyatt attacked him after Ryback won his match against Bo Dallas. *He must have been talking to Ryback with all those creepy messages,* I thought, *not Roman or Dean. Thank goodness…*

“Lana, you ok?” She was just standing there, looking sad, outside of gorilla.

“I am fine,” she said. “Rusev just… I vaz distracting of his message. So I wait here.”

“Ah…” I didn’t want to overstep my bounds, but I didn’t want her to be alone either. I brought over two chairs and set them up. “Those heels look killer.”

She smiled a little and sat down. “I am used to them. You… don’t dress nicely? Does Seth Roollins not care wat you look like?”

I snorted, very unladylike. “I’m the one who doesn’t care. Rollins and I are… well, we used to be friends. Now we’re not. You know the story of the Shield. Hardly anyone who doesn’t…”

“Ah, yes, the ‘betrayal’. I see wat you mean.”

“Anyway, I’d rather dress comfortably than anything else, especially now that I’m working for Rollins again. If I need to make a quick getaway, then it’s better to be wearing sneakers than heels.”

“True, true.

“Y/N, can I talk to you?” Kane asked, walking up to us. “Hey, Lana. Sorry to interrupt, but this is official business.”

“Is ok. Take her for meeting and I vill see her later.”

I kissed Lana’s cheek impulsively. “Stay out of trouble.”

I grinned at Kane. “Yeah, that’s a really good idea--”

“Kane, look, I’m not mad. I’m not mad,” Seth said as soon as he entered Kane’s office, the Jays trailing behind him. “But I need to know what you meant by ‘the WWE Universe will decide’ in regards to my title defense at Payback. What are you talking about?”

“Well, before you so rudely interrupted,” I said. “We were actually just talking about it. Go on, Kane. Tell him. It’s a fantastic idea, by the way.”

“I’ll be the judge of that,” Seth said. “So? Come on, lay it on me.”

“It’s simple, really,” Kane said. “By using the WWE app--”

“Because you know,” Seth said, interrupting yet again. “I’ve beaten Roman and Brock at Wrestlemania. I’ve beaten Randy, just a little less than twenty-four hours ago. So, really, there is absolutely, positively no reason either of them should have an opportunity at my title! Kane… are you out of your mind?!”
Kane twitched a little. “Rollins,” I said, trying to warn him. “Maybe don’t be so hostile to--”

Kane held his hand up to me, then stepped closer to Seth so that they were almost nose to nose. Softly, dangerously, he said, “Maybe… I… am…”

The sheer fear on Seth’s face was enough to tell me that Kane was not messing around. Seth took a step back, but then he stepped forward again. “Hey! Do you have any idea what Hunter and Stephanie are going to say when they hear about this? Do you even care?? Or maybe… maybe you’re too stupid to care!”

“Seth! You apologize this instant!”

He snorted. “I meant every word.”

“You know,” Kane said. “Seth. Considering how you carry yourself around here, like you’re the man--”

“I am the man!”

“Then I would think that letting the WWE Universe pick your opponent from one of two men would be something that you can handle,” Kane said.

“I can handle it!”

“Clearly you can’t,” I said, raising an eyebrow at him. He scowled at me. “Oh, I’m sorry, or were you not just complaining about it?”

“He was,” Kane agreed. “And since he was, and since he's going to tattle on me, and since he’s going to insult my intelligence, I guess there’s really only one solution.”

“Yeah? And what’s that?” Seth asked, sarcasm dripping from his voice.

“We add a third option. Now, the WWE Universe will get to pick from Randy Orton, or Roman Reigns, or Randy Orton and Roman Reigns! At the same time. In a triple threat match.”

“What?! What?! You cannot be serious! Are you out of your mind?! A triple threat match?!”

“Seth, Seth, Seth,” Kane said, smiling much too broadly. “Calm down. We have a very important match to focus on, and then, after the match, we’ll find out who your opponent at Payback will be. See you out there!” Kane practically skipped out of room, he was so happy.

“A triple threat match?! That is the last thing that I wanted! How could you let him do this to me?!” he asked, turning on me.

“Me? Rollins, you were the one running your mouth. If you had just shut up about Randy and Roman, it would have been a one on one match, and you’d have your Champion’s Advantage. I mean, you still have a thirty-three point three percent chance of that still happening, but since you had to go and open your fat mouth, it did drop down from a one hundred percent chance.”

“Don’t you mean a fifty-fifty chance?” Jamie asked.

“No. I don’t. Look, all I’m saying is, there’s still a shot, and hey, at least it’s not a Fatal Fourway! Small consolation there.”

Seth just grumbled as he stomped out of the room.
R-Truth picked up the win over Stardust in their first round match. He had stated that he would ban all spiders, small, large and medium, if he became king. I giggled at the thought of him attempting to fulfill that promise.

“Which option you voting for?” Dean asked me, looking over my shoulder at my phone. I had the WWE open to the poll for Seth’s match at Payback.

“I’m torn between Roman versus Rollins, and the triple threat match. You?”

“Same. On the one hand, Roman has a better chance one on one. On the other, the traitor has to fight two dudes and doesn’t have his usual advantages.”

“But, in a triple threat, there’s no disqualifications, so the Jays and/or Kane could step in to help him and it would be perfectly legal. So if that happens, Ro is a sitting duck, and has no second chance available, until he re-earns it. Whereas, if it’s a one on one, and he ends up winning because of disqualification, he’ll be up at the front of the line.” That settled it. I hit the choice for Roman versus Seth.

“Hedging your bets then?”

“I suppose. My vote is just one of many, and I have a feeling the WWE Universe would rather see Rollins have twice the trouble.” I kissed Dean’s cheek. “You better get going. Your match is next.”

“Thanks, kiddo.”

“No tariffs on ale, no pop country, and street fights to settle legal issues. Well, it’s not worse than Truth’s ‘no spiders’ kingdom, and better than Barrett’s kingdom,” I mumbled to myself. Dean had been interviewed on what he would do if he became King Of The Ring. It was about what I expected.

What I did not expect was for Dolph to interfere and attack Sheamus during the match, causing Dean to lose by disqualification. Dean was understandably upset. “For once in my life, I didn’t do it!” he was screaming at the ref, but there was nothing that could be done.

Chills went up my spine as Bray took over the video feed. He was speaking to someone again, and I knew in that moment that it couldn’t possibly have been Ryback. He had merely been part of Bray’s statement to the object of his obsession, not the focus of it.

“Will you ever realize... who you truly are? Or will you be a man obsessed with his own vanity?” The only vain man I could think of was Miz, but Bray didn’t see things the same way the rest of us did.

“Please don’t be after Roman or Dean,” I whispered. “Please...”

The final match of the King Of The Ring Tournament ended with Neville’s win over Luke Harper.
There would be an exclusive live showing of the semi-finals and finals tomorrow night on the Network, but if Dean wasn’t involved, I wasn’t particularly interested.

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“Sorry, Ro. I just don’t feel right about it. Rollins is my client now, and… it goes against my personal ethics.” I shook my head. Roman had asked for his usual good luck kiss. “I wish it didn’t, but it does.”

“Don’t worry about it, baby girl,” Roman said, kissing my forehead. “I get it, and I wouldn’t want you to be any other way. You gonna be out there? At ringside?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know yet. Maybe. Maybe not. Last time was tough.”

“But it’s like you said, you gotta toughen up for this sort of thing, right?” I nodded. “Then as much as I hate saying it, if Seth’s going to continue being champion, you should be at ringside tonight. Besides, even if I don’t see you cheering for me, I know you will be, right?”

Grinning at him, I said, “Right!”

**********

I stood at ringside, trying to cover up the giggles that I couldn’t contain as the crowd started chanting Justin Bieber! at Seth. He was visibly annoyed by it. Seth and Roman started the match off. There was a lot of twisting and escaping holds, and Seth’s frustration was already showing up. Roman escaped a wrist hold and reversed it, flipping Seth onto his back hard. Seth bounced a little on the mat and then immediately rolled out of the ring, despite being on the opposite side of it, so he basically rolled across the entire ring. It was really funny actually.

“You wanna tag out?” Kane asked him.

“I’ve outwrestled him before, I can do it again,” Seth growled, getting back into the ring. Not even a minute later and Roman slammed Seth into the mat, then picked him up and trapped him in the corner. Randy tagged in, and kicked Seth.

“Jeez…” I muttered. “Get your head in the match, Rollins…” He was too amped up, too emotionally charged over this as his frustrations continued to mount. He managed to escape Randy and roll out of the ring again, close by where I stood. “Tag Kane in already and cool your damn head,” I hissed at him.

“I was just about to,” he hissed back at me.

Once they had switched, I could see the tension leave Seth a bit. We both watched Roman dominate Kane, then switch with Randy, who continued to dominate, but Kane got a lucky break and turned the tide on Randy, dragging him to his corner. He tagged Seth back in and Seth started to stomp hard on Randy’s stomach until Randy pushed back and rolled out of the ring. Seth attempted to go after him, but was held back by the referee. The Jays used that opportunity to continue the stomping on Randy.

“Get the hell away from him!” I snarled, pushing Jamie and Joey away.

“Just doing our job, darlin’,” Jamie said, smirking at me. The ref was looking our way again.

“Thanks, Y/N,” Randy said, getting to a sitting position. “I appreciate you doing that for me.”
I glared at Randy. “I didn’t do it for you. I did it because it was right.” He chuckled at that.

“I can’t wait until you’re my manager. We’ll work well together.” Randy got up slowly and went back into the ring.

“It’ll be a cold day in hell when I work well with you,” I muttered. Seth still had Randy at his pace, was slowly chipping away at his stamina. I joined in Kane’s applauding of Seth, though I wasn’t quite as enthusiastic, but then Randy turned it around with a T-Bone Suplex, creating a space and both Randy and Seth crawled to their corners to tag in their partners. Roman practically exploded on Kane, slap after slap, cornering him for his ten punches. Seth tried to interfere, but he ran right into a Samoan Drop, and then was sent over the top rope to the hard mats below. Kane charged at Roman and was sent over the top rope as well. Roman got ready for a suicide dive, but Joey grabbed his leg while Jamie distracted the ref. “Hey!” I yelled at him.

“I got this, baby girl, just step aside.” Roman jumped out of the ring and went after Joey. I got out of the way, but Joey led Roman right into Kane, who slammed Roman into the steel post.

I had to back away to keep myself from interfering. Roman would be pissed at me if I did. It was one thing to stop the Jays assault on Randy, it was completely different to stop Kane’s on Roman’s. Kane threw Roman into the post a second time before tossing him into the ring, kicking Roman. Seth tagged in, and he began stomping on Roman. I felt my heartbeat speed up as panic began to set in. The world was starting to tilt to the left and then I felt a hand on my back. Turning around, I saw Lillian, the ring announcer.

“Sit down, sweetie,” she whispered. “You look like you’re about to faint.” I let her guide me to the timekeeper’s area and sat with her. I kept my eyes down for the most part, the one time I looked up was to see Roman being pushed against the ropes, choking from the pressure on his windpipe.

“Oh god…” I gasped, and squeezed my eyes shut again. I could only listen to the action, to the roar of the crowd, and to Seth yelling at Roman and Randy that neither one of them would be taking away his championship. I didn’t open them again until I heard the crowd go absolutely nuts. I opened them to see Roman being pushed against the ropes, choking from the pressure on his windpipe.

I jumped into the ring to check on Seth, glancing at Kane, who was furiously pacing in front of the announcer’s area. Snapping my fingers in front of Seth’s face, I asked, “Hey, you with me, Rollins?”

He shook his head to clear it. “Yeah… I’m with you. Damn Kane…” I sighed and helped him up. He hobbled over to the ropes for support.

Kane grabbed a microphone and started talking, though he was still out of breath. “Now… time to find out… who Seth Rollins will face… at Payback.” The choices appeared on the screen above the ramp. “Will it be… Randy Orton? Will it be Roman Reigns? Or… will it be Orton and Reigns?”

A drumroll started, and then the answer appeared. At seventy-eight percent of the vote, Seth would be facing Randy and Roman in a triple threat match. It consoled me a little to see that Roman had gotten fifteen percent of the vote while Randy only had seven. “Well…” I said softly. “Payback’s going to be fun.”
“Yeah,” Seth said, angrily glaring at the screen. “Loads.” He turned and walked over to Kane, but Roman Speared him in the middle of the ring and then threw his head back in a howl. I ran back to Seth to check on him again while Roman stood in the corners of the ring, hands held aloft in victory.

“How many fingers am I holding up?” I asked, holding up two fingers.

“I fucking hate Kane…” Seth mumbled. He coughed a little before answering my question. “Two.”

“You’ll live. And you better shape up in regards to Kane, otherwise things will just get worse for you,” I told him.

“You’re not on his side, are you?”

I rolled my eyes. “I’m not on anyone’s side. It’s just logical, you idiot.”

“Whatsoever…”

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - April 30, 2015

I nodded to Kane. “Ok, I’ll let Rollins know—”

“Well, look who we have here.” I had been talking to Kane about tonight’s schedule when Seth and the Jays walked in. “Take a lot of nerve to show up after the stunt you pulled on Monday,” Seth snarled.

“Rollins…” I said, but Kane stopped me.

“If I remember correctly, you were the one that hit me not once but twice. So excuse me if—I’ll beat Randy and Roman just like I beat everyone else.”

“Well, good,” I said.

“But as director of operations, he’s supposed to make decisions that are best for business which means best for me,” Seth said, getting into Kane’s personal space.

I smacked my face with my palm. “For the love of… Give me strength…” I muttered.

“What is better for business than giving the audience exactly what they want? Which seems to be a triple threat match for the championship.”

“That is crap. The truth, Kane, is that you’re just jealous of the fact that I’m champion and you’re not.”

“Oh please,” I said, crossing my arms over chest. “Kane is a grand slam champion. Why would he be jealous of you?”
“Because I’m everything he wants to be and never will. All he can do is watch as my star rises and his fades away.” Seth cackled at that.

“Part!” Kane yelled, then stopped and calmed himself. “Part of my job is to ensure that you grow as a champion and as a person. Y/N understands this aspect as it is part of her job as well.”

“We’re like your parents but much harsher,” I said with a grin.

“You are not my mother and Kane is certainly not my father,” Seth protested.

I turned to Kane and said, “I think we should start calling him ‘sonny boy’, just to piss him off. What do you think?”

Kane snorted. “Like hell I’m doing that, but I’m going to make a man out of you, Seth, if it’s the last thing I do. Since you’re here, tonight, you’re going to face the man you were supposed to face last week, Dean Ambrose.”

“What?!”

“Because that’s what’s best for business.” Kane was daring Seth to contradict him. Seth looked to me instead.

“Rollins, he’s not wrong,” I said delicately. “Going up against Dee is going to be good for you. I promise.”

“I’ve gone against him a million times before--”

“Well, that’s clearly an exaggeration.”

“--and I’ll be damned if I have to go against him again!” Seth huffed. “You know what I think is best for business?”

“I’m sure you’re going to inform us whether we want to know or not,” Kane said dryly.

“I think that what would best for business is the Kane from twenty years ago! Not this Kane, not this irrelevant Kane standing in front of me. You know what? I dare you, I dare you, Kane, to go out there and do something to prove that you have any viability left to give the Authority! Gah!”

Seth turned and stomped out of the room, the Jays in tow.

“Little punk…” Kane muttered.

“Don’t listen to him, Kane,” I said, sighing. “He’s just being a brat because things aren’t going the way he thought it would.”

“Too bad I’m not his father, I’d take him over my knee and beat his punk ass.”

“I’m really glad I’m not his mom, she told me horror stories about him growing up. This…” I gestured in the direction Seth had gone. “This is nothing.”

“The gods and demons help us then.”

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Roman opened the show by addressing the crowd. I was watching with Seth. The Jays were off doing something, and Kane was doing his job. “First off, shout out to my boy, Dean Ambrose. You’re going up against the WWE Champion tonight, our LITTLE brother, Seth Rollins.” Seth
growled at that. I giggled. “Let’s talk about Seth Rollins real quick. This guy… he SINGLE
HANDEDLY destroyed what we, as a group, created. Turned his back on me, on Dean, and on our
little sister, the heart and soul of our group.” I couldn’t laugh at that. Fortunately, Seth stayed
silent as well. “Not only that, he took the opportunity that I earned, that I sweated blood for, that I
worked every day to get, and he made it allllll about him. And since Wrestlemania, I have had to
scratch and claw my way back, to make every fight the biggest fight of my life, but…” He chuckled.
“But just WAIT until Payback, when I bring the biggest fight of them all to Seth Rollins and Randy
Orton.” The crowd went nuts for that, cheering loudly enough that I had to turn down the sound on
the monitor we were watching.

Then Kane’s music, those eerie organs, came on over the speakers. He walked out to the ring,
removing his shirt as we went down the ramp, then calling for a referee.

“Oh, snap…” I said. “He’s not… Nope, he totally is.” The bell had rung to start the match. “So is
this what you expected when you dared Kane to prove himself.”

Seth shrugged. “It’s a start.”

“You’re a jerk. You do realize that Kane really is doing his best for you, but you make it awfully
hard when you act like an ungrateful asshole, right?”

“I do not--”

“You do, and you are. And if Roman gets broken because Kane snapped, I will make your life a
living hell,” I promised.

“Dollface…”

“Don’t even try to talk me out of it. I’m already pissed you disrespected Kane like that.” Seth
stared at me as I watched the match. Roman was hurt, but was managing somehow to keep up with
Kane.

“Are you… Do you have a crush on Kane?” Seth asked incredulously.

I rolled my eyes. “He’s old enough to be my father, idiot. I just have a healthy respect for him,
unlike you. And he’s not so bad once you get to know him.”

“I’m so sure,” Seth said. The Jays walked in just then. “Did you guys see this? Kane started a
match against Roman.”

“Oh? How’s he doing?” Jamie asked. We all watched as Roman DDT’ed Kane into the mat, then
Superman Punched him, and attempted to Spear him, but Kane rolled out of the ring and started
walking up the ramp. The ref started to count to ten, but Kane ignored him.

“Win by countout,” I said quietly. “He rushed it, then faltered, and didn’t even try to bring it back
around.” I sighed. “I hope you’re happy, Rollins. This is your fault for taunting him earlier.”

Seth snorted and didn’t look one iota bothered by that fact.

Renee came in to interview Seth. “Can I just get your thoughts on the match?” she asked. I stepped
behind Seth as the camera man drew closer.

“Well,” Seth started. “Isn’t it obvious? He started a fight he couldn’t finish. He got in deeper than
he could handle. Do you want to know what the major difference between me and Kane is, Renee?
Besides the fact that he carries around a senior citizen discount card, I mean.”
I kicked Seth’s shoe. “He’s only forty-eight, you ass!” I hissed at him. Renee stifled a laugh and thankfully the microphone didn’t pick up my words. Seth ignored me, though I did see him flinch a little from my kick.

“The difference between me and Kane… I never run away from a fight.” I snorted at that, and Seth kicked backwards to hit me in the lower shin. Not hard, but hard enough. “I always find a way to win the fight, no matter the costs, all on my own. Which is exactly what I’m going to do at Payback. I am going to beat Randy Orton. I am going to beat Roman Reigns. All. On. My. Own. I don’t need the help of the Authority. I don’t need the help of the WWE Universe. I don’t--” He turned to look at the Jays. “I don’t need the help of you two.” Jamie and Joey looked at each other and nodded in agreement, though they didn’t look happy about it. “I don’t need the help of any one, because I am the future, and the future is now. I am the Man,” Seth said, then walked away.

The Jays followed, leaving me with Renee. “You have your hands full with that one,” she said to me, laughing a little. “Good luck.”

“Thanks. I really need it.”

**********

“So I hear there’s no good luck available if Roman or I go up against the traitor?” Dean asked me, cornering me in catering. I pushed him away and made my way to a table with my food. The monitor in the corner of the room was showing the current match of Curtis Axel versus Damian Sandow, formerly Mizdow. Curtis had come out on Raw and told Damian that he didn’t like copycats, which was a laugh since Curtis was currently a carbon copy of Hulk Hogan. They’re both idiots, I thought. He followed after getting some for himself. “Well?”

“That’s correct. You know how I feel about being a professional.”

“Yeah, but… he’s a traitor!”

I sighed. “I know, I know. But I can’t go against my own logic. If I break this rule, then what about the next, or the next?”

“It’s not a rule that you have to go against your brothers for the traitor.”

I huffed. “I’m not… Dee, look, this is really hard for me, ok? But I have to be able to sleep at night, and if that means abstaining from giving you a good luck kiss before a match, then I’m going to do it. Besides, it’s not like I’m doing it for every match, and I’m not giving Rollins any good luck at all. I have faith in you and Roman, so, I really don’t see what the big deal is.”

“Fine, but you have to give me a congratulations hug after I win against Rollins tonight. And… I want you to stay in the back. I don’t want you at ringside.”

“Ok? Sure, I can do that.”

**********

“Thanks for getting me this tape, kiddo. You always find the best stuff.” I didn’t have the heart to tell him it was just the regular tape from the trainers. I was hanging out with Dean in the locker room, since Seth was off somewhere with the Jays and their match wasn’t until later.

“No problem, Dee. So what do you want to do after--”

“Dean! Dollface!” We both turned to see Seth and the Jays walking in. Dean pushed me behind
him. “Hey, calm down now. I’m not here to fight. Take it easy, I just wanted to talk. I was thinking—”

“Rollins…” I said with a warning tone. I already had a bad feeling about where this was going.

“I was just thinking,” he continued, glaring at me, “that we have a lot of history, and I think… it’s in both of our best interests if… if you back out.” Dean was staring so hard at Seth’s head that I was surprised it wasn’t on fire yet.

“Back out? Why?” he asked.

“I’d like to know why, too,” I said, “Because this sounds like it’s got some fascinating logic behind it. Logic that you’re about to supply to Dean Ambrose, the Lunatic Fringe.” Dean chuckled.

Seth looked uncomfortable. “Well, I’ve got the triple threat match coming up, huge match, you know, well, not that you would know, but the point here… Kane. Kane’s just making this match to mess with me, to humiliate me.” Dean’s eyes glazed over a little as he thought about that. “And once Triple H finds out, he’s going to rain hell down on everyone involved, including you, so really, it’s for your own good if you just… back out.”

Dean nodded. “Sounds good.”

“Really?” I asked. Seth looked pleased and turned away.

“See you out there!” Dean said merrily.

Seth turned back. “Wait, what? But you just said it sounded good.”

“Oh… I meant the ‘humiliate’ part sounds good. I stopped listening after that.” Dean grinned. “You talk a lot, but not a lot of interesting things come out of that mouth of yours.”

“You are making a huge mistake!”

Dean shrugged. “My whole life is a mistake. At least this one ends in me beating your face in. See ya. Kiddo, be good.” He patted my head and left.

“Can you believe that guy?” Seth asked us.

“Yes. Yes, I can,” I said, very amused that Seth thought it would actually work to ask Dean to back out.

**********

“Dean knows you feel uncomfortable at ringside,” Roman said, taking a seat next to me. “That’s why he asked you to stay back here.”

“Oh… I was wondering, but I need to--”

“I know, but you don’t have to go out to every match. Just…” He thought a bit about it. “Think of this as a breather. Like when we have to create some space between us and an opponent. Next time, you’ll go out. And the next time, but then maybe the next match you’ll stay back here, ya know?”

I nodded. “Yeah, that sounds a bit easier.” I pointed at the screen. “Their match is about to start.”

It was going pretty well, at least until Dean hit by a Baseball Slide while outside the ring and the Jays started stomping on him while Seth distracted the referee. Kane walked out to the ring at that
point. Seth clearly had reservations about Kane’s presence, but Kane was being supportive despite that.

Dean got a second wind and took control of the match. “I… I should get out there,” I said. It was obvious to me that Dean and Seth were winding each other up and that this could only end badly.

“What do you gotta do, baby girl,” Roman said.

I got out there just in time to see Dean taking a suicide dive into Seth, then throwing him into the ring and slamming him into the mat face first. He attempted to pin Seth, very awkwardly I might add, but Seth kicked out. Seth regained enough momentum to pick Dean up and throw him into the corner for a Turnbuckle Powerbomb. He pinned Dean, but Dean kicked out on the second count.

Seth was incredulous and started arguing with the ref, along with Kane, who had hopped up onto the apron. I had gotten to the ring by then, though no one had noticed me. Dean took the opportunity to charge at Seth, knocking him into Kane, then rolling him up into a pin. Seth kicked out, tried to attack Dean, but Dean just sent him over the ropes, right into Kane, who had just gotten to his feet again. The Jays helped them both to their feet, right in time for Dean to launch himself from the top of the corner post into Kane and the Jays. Seth got out of the way before Dean landed, and shoved Dean into the barricade.

Seth then came back to Kane, asking, “Are you alright? You ok?”

Kane grabbed Seth by the throat, growling. I couldn’t hear what Kane was saying, but Dean jumped onto the announce table and then jumped at Kane, who caught him by the throat with his other hand.

“Kane! Let them go!” I yelled, grabbing Kane’s arm. “You’ll nullify this match!”

The ref was yelling at Kane as well. “Let go! I will disqualify you! I won’t have a choice!”

Kane did let go, but then he reached for the referee, threatening to Chokeslam him. “Kane! No! You can’t!” I pleaded with him. He was just so angry, I don’t think he could hear me at all.

“Kane!”

Dean grabbed Kane from behind and shoved him into steel post, but in doing so, I got caught by Kane’s extended arm, essentially Clotheslining me to the mat. Dean had gone into tunnel vision mode and didn’t realize it was me, or maybe he just hadn’t seen me. My head was swirling as I lay there on my side, my vision blocked by my own arm. I heard Seth screaming, and Dean responding in kind. There was a loud thud of body meeting steel, and then mere seconds later, I heard the bell ringing. Someone had won. JoJo, the ring announcer, was saying something, but my brain couldn’t process her words. I heard the crowd jeering, then Roman’s music. Cheers, lots and lots of cheers. I could feel the vibrations of the ring as they all fought inside it. Roman’s music played again, so he must have been victorious. Next thing I knew, I was being lifted up by strong arms.

“Shit… kiddo, when--”

“Not now, Dean,” Roman growled. “We have to get her to medical.”

I dumbly wondered if Seth was ok as my brothers carried me out.

**********

I was laying in bed, trying to get to sleep, when I heard the lock click on my hotel room right before the hallway light flooded in. The door closed again and the room was back to pitch black.

“Who’s there?” I asked, reaching for anything nearby that could be used as a weapon. My hand fell
on the clock radio. It would have to do. Roman and Dean were staying in a separate room tonight, since the medical staff had said I needed peace and quiet to recover. I knew they would try, but the two of them combined was anything but quiet.

“It’s me,” I heard.

“Seth…” I said, sighing in relief and letting go of the clock. “Wait, how did you get a keycard?”

“I know all your info, it wasn’t hard to convince the desk clerk it was my room,” he said, sliding onto the bed. “How are you?”

“Been better, been worse. I’ll live.” I could smell the scent of his body wash and shampoo. I was suddenly very glad I had showered as well. “Heard you won. Congrats.”

“Yeah… I did…” He didn’t sound happy about it.

“What’s wrong?”

“You got hurt. And I didn’t even realize you were there.”

I snorted. “No one did. Which is how I got into this trouble. It was my own fault, I should have let things take their course. I just…” I sighed heavily. “I saw how it was going to go, and I knew something would happen. I didn’t want you or Dean to win on a disqualification just because Kane snapped. I couldn’t stand by and just watch that happen. You know?”

“Not really.”

I smiled. “Well, I know what I’m talking about. And, for the record, I’m fine. No concussion, no down time needed. Just a tender spot on the side of my head, which will go away soon enough.”

Seth scooted closer and wrapped his arms around me. “Good.” I didn’t have the willpower to push him away.

When I woke up the next morning, Seth was nowhere to be seen, and I wondered if I had merely dreamed that he had visited me.
Roman opened Raw. He was talking about how the name Payback was appropriate, because that was exactly what he was going to get on Seth. \textit{“And Reigns is going to have to learn to live with disappointment, because I am walking out of Payback as the NEW Heavyweight Champion!”} 

“Ugh, just shut up already,” I muttered, just as Roman’s music hit the speakers. “Thank goodness.” 

“Yeah... all that stuff you just said, that’s not going to happen.” I loved it when Roman went cocky on people I wasn’t fond of. \textit{“If anyone is getting payback on Seth Rollins, it’s me.”} 

Annoyingly, the crowd booed Roman, and then started calling for an RKO. 

\textit{“Just so you know, they don’t fight for you,”} Roman informed Randy, pointing to the crowd. 

\textit{“Ooooh, so scared,”} Randy said. \textit{“So, if I’m understanding you correctly, you’re getting payback at Payback... Very clever! And what... I’m just supposed to... stand in the corner? Twiddle my thumbs and just watch you?”} 

“That would be ideal for Roman, I supposed.” I heard a laugh behind me and turned to see Joey. \textit{“Rollins’ isn’t here, try the executive lounge.”} He watched for me for bit. “What?” He just shook his head and left. “Odd man.” 

I turned back to the monitor. \textit{“--come near me and you won’t be standing.”} Roman was saying to Randy. 

Randy was flabbergasted. \textit{“Do you know who you’re talking to?”} 

\textit{“I know. I just don’t care,”} Roman said. \textit{“I also know there’s a history between us.”} 

“Yeah, you tell him, Ro. Stupid Viper.” Randy had said he and I would work well together if I could set aside our past run-ins. That was highly unlikely. 

\textit{“Y/N,”} a stage hand poked her head into the room. \textit{“Mr. Rollins is looking for you.”} 

I rolled my eyes. “Where is he?” 

“Hallway B.” 

“Ok, if you see him before I do, tell him I’m on my way, please.” 

“Sure.” 

I turned back to the monitor. New Day had come out, and for some reason, were announcing that Randy and Roman had a match against them, a two-on-three handicap match. “Well, crud.” 

********** 

“Dollface,” Seth said when I found him and the Jays. I had spent \textit{several} minutes looking for him, and I was annoyed that he hadn’t been in Hallway B, but I \textit{had} heard that Roman and Randy’s match against the New Day had ended in a loss, which really just annoyed me further. I could vaguely hear the New Day cheering for themselves nearby. Seth grabbed my head and looked at
my skull. “How’s the injury?”

I smacked his hands away. “Weirdo, don’t manhandle me, and don’t call me ‘dollface.’ I’m fine. Now, what do you want?”

“Who says I want anything?”

“You usually call for me when you want something,” I said, crossing my arms over my chest. “Now, what is it?”

“Back up.”

“What? How am I supposed to be back up? I’m not--”

“No,” he said, pulling me to the side. “Back up, get behind me.”

Kane approached us. “Oh,” I said.

“You know, I find it funny that you think that what you did is going to make a difference,” Seth said. “You’re kind of like that little kid who’s been acting up all year long and the night before Christmas, he tries to make up for it just to get on Santa’s Nice List. What you did out there, pitting Roman and Randy against each other, that was great, but--”


“Two steps behind, as usual, darlin’,” Jamie said. I wanted to slap him.

“Maybe if you three were where I was told you would be, I could have spent that time finding out what was going on instead of searching the arena for you.” I glared at Jamie, who shrank a little.

“Roman and Randy have a match against each other in the main event tonight,” Kane explained. “Ah, ok. Carry on.”

“As I was saying, that’s great and all, but Stephanie and Hunter will be back soon, and when they get here, you’re going to be punished for what you’ve been doing to me.” Seth looked so smug, I had to roll my eyes.

“I’m sorry, Seth, I can’t really relate. You see, when I was a kid, so very long ago, I didn’t have a very good relationship with Santa. I would sit up on Christmas Eve, waiting by the fireplace with a blowtorch, attempting to fry his chestnuts.”

“Wow,” I said. “And ouch.” Seth and the Jays were grimacing.

Kane laughed. “Regardless, I made those matches with Reigns and Orton because it was simply what was best for business. And actually, that brings me to you. I don’t think the WWE World Heavyweight Champion should just be sitting around, doing nothing, while his opponents are in action.”

“What are you talking about?” Seth asked. He really did look confused.

“A match, Rollins,” I supplied helpfully. “He’s saying you’re going to have a match.”

“Exactly!”

“Wait, no, that is exactly not what he’s-- The first thing, that’s what he’s supposed to do!” Seth
“Well, we’ll have to agree to disagree,” Kane said. And since last week’s main event on Smackdown was marred by interference, tonight, we’re going to have a rematch. You against Dean Ambrose.”

“What?!”

“And… just to prevent any more interference, J and J Security is banned from ringside.” Kane was a little gleeful at that last part.

“They weren’t even-- You were the interference!! It’s your fault Y/N got hurt!”

“Hey, leave me out of this,” I protested.

“There is no reason I need to beat Dean Ambrose because I already did! And he knows it! The only reason he’s going to go out there is to hurt me before my match at Payback. How do you not understand that?”

“Well, if you prefer, we could tie one of your hands behind your back. Or we could tie up your ankles. Or, we could just tie you to a ring post, and see how it works out for you.”

“Tie him to a ring post and leave him shirtless,” I said. “A good chunk of both male and female fans would love that.” Seth looked at me in annoyance. “What? We could charge five bucks a pop, make a lot of money. No? Fine. Spoilsport.”

“Just say the word, and I’ll make it happen.” Kane was smiling very broadly. Seth opened his mouth, but Kane held up a finger. “Just. Say. One. Word. And we’ll have a new main event.”

Seth really wanted to say something, but he only yelled in frustration and stomped off.

**********

“Kane, you’re looking well.” In my time with the Authority, Kane had easily become my favorite of them all, even if we didn’t always see eye to eye. In my quest to help Seth, I saw Kane as an ally, though he probably would be appalled if I ever told him.

“Y/N, about last Thursday…”

“Don’t worry about it. I’m fine, completely and one-hundred percent fine, and… I know it was an accident. I shouldn’t have--”

“No, you were in the right. It was my fault you were in that position, and… I’m sorry.”

“Apology accepted. Now, I actually do have a reason for being here.”

“You here to convince me to stop the rematch between Ambrose and Seth?” He folded his arms over his massive chest. I had followed Seth, and he had made it abundantly clear what he thought of Kane’s decision in an interview with Renee, badmouthing the man even worse than usual. It was pissing me off and I had told him so, but he had “ordered” me to go talk to Kane about his match. I was really about to just stir up some trouble for him, because I thought a match against Dean was a good thing for him and I was really was annoyed by how he was acting. Please, Dean wasn’t about to let Seth run over him.

“Of course not. I would never dream of that, even if Rollins thinks that’s why I’m talking to you. I
respect your decisions on this matter. I was even thinking that it’s a *shame* that he doesn’t see this match as the advantage it is. All of these turmoil, this adversity, it could turn him into the champion I know he can be. It’s what you said, right? It’s part of our job to help him grow as a champion and a person. But instead of seeing this as the opportunity it is, he whines and complains… I mean, did you hear what he just said to Renee? How dare he call you a moron.”

Kane scoffed. “Unfortunately, yes. He’s a punk that needs a lesson.”

I placed my hand on Kane’s arm. “Yes. I completely agree that he does. His match is about to start, however, so if you plan to teach him one using it, your time is limited.”

Kane stared at me for a moment before smiling. “You’re right. Good talk, Y/N. I’m glad to see we’re on the same page. You are definitely the best manager Seth could have picked.”

I did a little curtsy and gave him a smile. “Why, thank you, Kane.”

**********

“Damn, baby girl. Can you believe what Kane just did?” Roman asked. We were watching Dean and Seth’s match backstage.

“Not quite what I expected, but hey, if it’s a fatal four-way, you and Dean can team up against Rollins. He won his title without pinning the champion. He can lose it the same way or rise to the challenge.” Kane had added the stipulation that if Dean won tonight’s match, he would be added to the title match at Payback.

“You are vicious.”

“Is that a bad thing?” I asked, looking up at him.

“Nah. Be careful how much you play with that fire though. You don’t want to get burned.”

“Who’s getting burned?” someone asked. I turned to see the my favorite wrestler from the developmental team.

“Just me, if I’m too bad to the bone,” I said with a giggle. “Hi, I’m Y/N.” I held out my hand.

He took it. “I’m--”

“Sami Zayn, yeah, I know. I’ve been watching you in NXT. You’re really good.” I smiled broadly at him. “I’m a bit of a fan of yours. Soooooo looking forward to your match with Kevin Owens.”

“Oh, wow, thanks. That means a lot coming from you,” he said, blushing a little. “I’ve watched you with Ambrose and Reigns.” He nodded at Roman. “Hey, man, how’s it going?”

“Good, good. Yourself?” Roman asked, taking a sip from his water bottle.

“Well, just got complimented by a pretty girl who knows her stuff, so I’m doing rather well.” He grinned at me.

“What are you doing here?” I asked, smiling back. Roman raised an eyebrow at me, but I ignored him.

“Ahh, that’s...” Sami looked around. “I’m here to challenge John Cena for the US Title. But it’s hush-hush, need to know. I don’t want him getting wind of it before I can do it.”
“Oh, wow. I won’t say a word then,” I said. “Good luck, I’ll be rooting for you.”

Sami blushed again, mumbled a thanks and wandered off.

“Baby girl, you’re definitely playing with fire.” Roman chuckled to himself.

“What? Why? I meant every word!”

Roman just shook his head, tossed the now empty bottle in recycling and walked away.

**********

Seth was livid, having just come from talking to Kane. I should have been there, but Seth had taken off before I could get to him, and was done by the time I realized he was with Kane in the first place. I walked with Seth and the Jays after Seth lost to Dean, ranting about the unfairness of the situation he found himself in. “How could you let him do that to me?!” he demanded.

“I cannot override our bosses, Rollins. Besides, it was these two morons that cost you that match. If anything, you should be yelling at them. If they hadn’t interfered, you might have won.” I believed that more than ever, but the support he had in the Authority was a crutch and one that he needed to get rid of.

“Hey, we’re trying to help him. That’s our job, sweetheart,” Jamie snapped. “What are you here for? To smile and look pretty. Maybe distract the ref if you showed a bit more skin. That’s all you're good for here, isn’t it?”

I narrowed my eyes at Jamie, my temper flaring. I didn’t think before I did it, and Jamie didn’t expect the hard slap to his cheek. He reacted instinctively, slapping me back. It hurt like a bitch, but since I started training with Paige and Natalya several months ago, I have had worse. I was able to reach past the pain and stare down Jamie in his shock. “That all you got?” I sincerely hoped he wouldn’t call my bluff. I could feel the beginnings of a bruise forming. With any luck, it wouldn’t be too noticeable, but I could always use coverup on it.

Seth was flabbergasted and Joey’s mouth was flapping like a fish.

“Fine. Deal with this on your own,” I snarled. “But, Noble… You strike me again, and I will end you.” I strode away, only to hear a yelp from Jaime and then feel someone chasing after me and grabbing my arm to whirl me around.

“Y/N…” Seth said, placing his other hand on my sore cheek. “Fuck… Are you… Are you ok? You just got injured last week, too…”

“I’m fine, Se-- I’m fine, Rollins. It’s barely going to bruise.” I was mostly sure on that at this point. His hand was cool on my skin, comforting against the heat of the injury. Seth was staring at me, his thumb stroking my cheek. “I’m going to go. You can deal with Kane, right?” I asked softly. I couldn’t take my eyes off his mouth for some reason. His tongue wicked against his lower lip, making me think about things I should not be thinking about in regards to Seth Rollins.

“I can do that,” he said just as softly. His thumb pressed against my bruised cheekbone, causing a small shot of pain.

I blinked, pulling myself from whatever trance I had been drawn into, and pushed him away. “Hunter contacted me a little while ago. He’ll be at Raw next week for sure. He wants to talk to you. And Kane.”
“Oh, right…”

I schooled my features and turned back to him. “Dad’s coming home, Rollins. You better start behaving.”

Seth smirked. “I’m always behaving.”

I rolled my eyes and left.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - May 7, 2015

“Did you see that?! Now my title match at Payback is a Fatal Four-way?! Are you trying to kill me?” Seth yelled.

“Seth, I know you’re upset, but this is all about making you better, making you...a man,” Kane said calmly. Seth shook his head and laughed derisively, obviously not believing Kane. “Overcoming adversity will help you become the person and the champion we know you can be. That we NEED you to be.”

Later on that night, in Roman’s match against Randy, the Jays, Kane and Seth surrounded the ring, taking out Randy and then Roman when he tried to stop them. Dean came barrelling down the ramp, providing much needed help to Roman and Randy. When the Authority had fled, all alliances were out the window. Randy RKO’ed Roman. Dean did Dirty Deeds on Randy. Last man standing in the ring, Dean Ambrose, can he win the WWE World Title?!

I stopped the tape there. “What the hell, Rollins?!”

“What?” he asked, his tone nonchalant.

“When I left you at Raw, you were relatively calm. What got your panties in a twist to do that?!” I demanded, pointing at the tv screen.

He shrugged. “Seemed like a good idea at the time. If Dean had stayed out of it--”

“Dean is now a participant in your title match, Rollins! Something you were being very vocal about, if I recall correctly. And Roman’s best friend to boot! Of course he was going to get involved! Oh my go-- Who’s idea was it?!”

Seth looked bored.

“Rollins!”

“Ugh, fine, it was Noble’s. But Kane agreed with it. And so did I.”

I wanted to slap him so badly. “You would do well to not listen to either Jamie or Joey. All of their ideas end up costing you in the end, even if the immediate result is satisfactory.”

“Not all their ideas,” he protested.

“Most, then. Look, I can’t make you do anything, but I strongly urge you to start thinking about the consequences before you jump into the next situation, because I know you,” I said, cutting him off before he could say otherwise. “You’re going to do something and you had better give it serious thought before you go through with it. Ok?”
“Fine...fine…”

“Damnit, Rollins, promise me.”

“FINE. I promise. I will think about my actions before jumping in.” He rolled his eyes. It was the best I would be getting out of him, and I hated that.

**********

I loved watching Renee interview Dean. Few people actually knew of their relationship, but when you knew, it changed the dynamic of their interviews.

“Ugh, can you believe those two?” Seth asked me. “Just get a room already!”

“Shut up, Rollins,” I said, happily grinning at them on the screen. “You wish you and your girlfriend could be that adorable. No one can beat those two in this category.” Seth didn’t say anything, so I turned around. “Cat got your tongue?”

“No…”

“Then? Just got nothing to say?”

He flipped his blond streak over his shoulder. It was nearly grown out all the way. “I was just thinking that with the right boyfriend...you probably could beat them in the cute category.”

“That so?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, then, they’re not going to have any competition anytime soon.” I turned back to the tv. “But thanks for the compliment.”

**********

“Nice promo,” I told Roman. He had just had an interview with Renee and was now hanging out in the hallway, sitting on one of the equipment crates. “So... Is the locker room full or something?”

“Yeah, or something. Some of the guys are really charged up and it’s easier to just be out here. Not like I’m in anyone’s way. Am I?”

I giggled and sat next to him on the crate. “Nah, you’re good.” I kicked my legs a little. Roman’s legs barely reached the floor. Mine didn’t have a chance. “So you feeling good for the contract signing? And Payback?”

“Of course. I have no doubt I’ll be walking out the new champion. You ready to be my manager again?” He wrapped an arm around my shoulders. “I’ve missed having you around, baby girl.”

“I’m always around, Ro.” I rolled my eyes. “I’m surprised you’re not sick of me.”

“Ha, never. You’re one of my favorite people. Someone I aspire to be more like.”

I ducked my head down, suddenly shy. I had always admired Roman, even before he became my big brother. Knowing he felt similar just made me so happy. “I’m...not sure how to feel about it, to be honest. About Payback, I mean. On one hand, being with you or Dean again would be great. Randy...he’s not one of my favorite people, but I’ll live. I think we could probably work well together, if I can set aside my general dislike of him. But...” I bit my lip. “Ro, I want to try and
bring Seth back. To...to free him from the Authority’s hold. I honestly don’t know if I can, but…”

Roman’s hand squeezed my shoulder. “You know, people say it was Dean that took Rollins’ betrayal hardest. But I think it was you took it just as hard, if not worse, though you never let it show. Not that Dean or I could be fooled, of course. You had so much faith in all of us, but especially in him. I don’t like it, this idea of yours, but I’m not going to stop you. Won’t tell Deano either, since he wouldn’t understand like I do. Just...be careful. JoJo needs her auntie. And I need my little sister.” He kissed my forehead.

“I promise. I’ll be careful,” I said softly.

**********

I had missed Randy’s interview with Renee while I was talking to Roman, but got to be front and center for Seth’s. Joy. I listened to him spew nonsense about Kane being jealous of him. Kane jealous of Seth. He was delusional and his arrogance was going to cripple him. I had to stop him, to humble him...just something to make sure he didn’t trip over his own ego. But what?

**********

Kane and I stood in the ring, a table in the middle, with four chairs and four microphones. “As Director of Operations,” Kane said, “my job is to make sure your voices are heard. And you said you wanted to see Seth Rollins defend his championship against not just one, but three challengers. Once this contract is signed by all four parties, there is no going back. Without further ado, our first contender, the Viper!”

Roman was next. He winked at me when he got to the table, but glared at Randy as he sat down. Dean was third, bouncing around like he had eaten too much sugar again. He probably hadn’t, which was scary if you thought about it.

Seth was last, of course. He would argue he’s not the least, I thought with amusement. He entered the arena but stayed at the top of the ramp with the Jays. And now what’s he up to…

Kane started talking about the match, but Dean had noticed the same thing I had. “Hey, wait a minute,” he said into his mike. “I know Justin Bieber over there is a VIP here in Canada, but doesn’t he need to be in the ring like the rest of us. C’mon, Biebs. Bring ol’ Frodo and Bilbo with you, an’ come on down!”

Seth cackled. “Oh, Ambrose, your humor never was my style, but it was always better than listening to Roman over there trying to form sentences.”

The grip on my tablet tightened. How... DARE he! Roman had struggled on the mike, but he was doing so much better nowadays.

“You see, I’m not coming down there. I think I’ll stay right where I am, but if you three have any unfinished business between you, then go ahead and feel free to sort that out.” Seth grinned as he crossed his arms over his chest, waiting for the fireworks.

Roman picked up his mike. “I’ve got a sentence for you, Rollins. I’m going to sign this contract, and then I’m going to kick your ass.” The crowd went nuts over that as Roman signed the contract, then pushed it over to Randy.

“Newsflash, Rollins,” Randy said, standing up, “We’re all here for that title around your waist, but I must say, having Y/N for a manager is a nice bonus.” He grinned at me, posed for the crowd, then tossed the microphone aside and signed with a determined flourish. I was not impressed.
Dean rose from his chair next. “Alright, alright, are you going to come down here and sign this contract, Bieber, or am I going to have to drag you into the ring myself?” He sat back down, angrily signing his name onto the contract.

“Uh, actually, both the director of operations and my manager have the authority to sign my name, so I’ll just leave it to one of them. Sounds better to me.” Seth took a step back, to further make his point.

Un-freaking-believable!

“That is correct, Seth,” Kane said, “In theory.”

Oh good. I was holding the contract, and it was tempting to just sign for Seth, but I also wanted to see where Kane was going to go with this. It wouldn’t do to get on his bad side, and Seth really needed another lesson on behavior at the moment. Not that any of the others seemed to be doing any good.

“I’m trying to remember what you said about me in your interview earlier, something about how I’m obsolete, or irrelevant… I don’t particularly recall.” He so did, but I kept my mouth shut. I liked where this was going. “In any case, yes, if you were physically unable to attend the signing, then I or the lovely Y/N could sign for you, but since you’re standing right there in front of us, in perfect health, I really must insist that you come down to the ring and sign it yourself.” The smile on Kane’s face could have lit up New York at night.

I borrowed Kane’s mike. “You have my word that nothing will happen to prevent you from signing the contract. I will even let you use me as a human shield, so please, come down to the ring.”

Seth dawdled for a moment or two, then, “Fine, but you don’t need to be a shield.” He made his way over to the ring, the Jays in tow, but once he got to the steps, he hesitated, then sent in Joey to retrieve the contract. “Just want to review it first,” he said, wandering around the outside of the ring with it.

More like stalling for some reason.

“Let’s see, seems everyone is accounted for. Dean Ambrose, or should I say ‘Low Rent Roddy Piper’? I never thought you were that great, but that’s what Roman used to call you with all the crazy antics you did to entertain these idiots.” The crowd jeered at the insult. Everything made sense now, he was stalling so that he could try to get under their skin with his poisonous words. Unlikely that they would fall for that sort of thing, but kudos to him for making an effort, I suppose. “There’s, uh, Roman Reigns, which is good, because he’s much better at signing autographs than he is at wrestling. Remember Dean? You used to say he couldn’t wrestle his way out of a wet paper bag.” The crowd oooooooooooohhhhh! at that one. “And Randy, I don’t want you to feel left out, but really, it’s no secret to how Dean and Roman feel about you. They use to call you spoiled, entitled. Roman said you never worked a day in your life. Hell, Ambrose used to say the only reason you’re in WWE is because of your old man.”

“They’re going to need some ice for them burns!” I heard someone in the audience say.

“Look, I’m just telling the truth, guys.” More like getting everyone’s ire up. I would have bet anyone that the three men were ready to jump Seth instead of each other at this point. He was headed towards the steps, so there was a good chance I would get to see it. “What’s wrong with a little honesty?”

“And what about me, Rollins?” I asked sweetly, though the venom in my voice was unmistakable.
The crowd couldn't hear me, but the guys in the ring could. “Got any truths about me?”

He didn't lift the mike to speak into it. “I... No, not about you.” He glanced at the others. “You're not my opponent. They are.”

Randy and Dean both stood up as Seth entered the ring and approached the table. Tensions were high, and I backed away into the corner. Seth signed the contract and then began to bicker with Kane. Neither they nor the Jays noticed when Dean started pushing the chairs to the side, and setting up the table in the corner. Randy moved in front of me. “Gotta keep my cute, new manager safe,” he said with a slow grin. I’d be impressed if I hadn’t found out for sure that he had a serious girlfriend and kid at home, with a second kid on the way. I was certain he was just trying to get on my good side, considering his history with my boys in general.

“Hey, I'll protect her,” Roman said with a growl. He also knew about Randy’s family, since he was the one I had asked about it, and he didn’t appreciate him seeming to hit on me.

“Or, I don’t know, I can protect myself?” I said, rolling my eyes. Roman scoffed at that. I would have been offended if it were anyone else.

Seth, Kane and the Jays had finally noticed what Dean was up to, and our attention was drawn back to him. He had taken the table and set it up at an angle on the corner post.

“What?” Dean asked. “We all know how this is going to end. Dibs on the table.” He tossed his microphone over his shoulder and went after the Jays. Chaos ensued, Randy going after Seth, Roman going after Kane, and Dean taking on the Jays. I shrieked after narrowly missing being hit by flying chair piece. Ducking down, I rolled out of the ring to relative safety.

Seth waited, until Randy had taken out Dean while Dean and Roman were arguing, and then Roman took out Randy, leaving just Roman for Seth to take out. He held his title aloft, screaming, “I’m the man! I’m the champion! No one is taking it from me!”

**********

“You ok?” he asked me once we were backstage.

“Yeah, peachy.” I sighed. “I’m going to ride with Renee and some of the Divas to the next city. Call me if you need me.”

I started to walk away. “Y/N.”

“Yeah?” I asked, turning back to Seth.

“Uh, thanks for...not getting involved. Staying safe…” He scratched at the back of his head nervously. “I mean...I know you were mad about...what I did...what I do to Roman and Dean...”

I walked up to Seth, mere inches from him, and looked him straight in the eye. “Don’t go all sentimental on me now, Rollins. As long as you don’t cross the line, you can mess with them all you want, just as they will mess with you. You still have ten days until Payback. Get your head in the game or you will be losing that title.”

Seth looked down at the belt in his hand, then back at me, grinning. “You got it, dollface.”

“And don’t call me dollface!” I shouted, walking away to find my friends.
“I told you to behave,” I said as Seth came backstage from his “talk” with Triple H in front of the entire arena. I was in front of a monitor watching the Jays’ impromptu match with Dean, granted when the Jays had mouthed off to Hunter. Both Renee and I had given him kisses of good luck, though Renee’s was much more intense. They had been watching with me as Hunter called both Seth and Kane out. As far as I was concerned, a match against Randy was a fitting punishment for him. “You just had to mouth off, didn’t you?”

“Didn’t think he’d go that far,” Seth said, pouting.

“Well, he did. So just...think of it as a warm-up match. A time to get into Randy’s head, and not let him get into yours, because he will try to.” I winced as I saw Jamie hit Dean particularly hard, enough to make him go down.

“I shouldn’t even be in this--”

I cut Seth off by placing my hand over his mouth. “Rollins. You can beat Randy. I know you can. You asked for me to be your manager, and while I would have turned it down if it was an option, I am committed to doing my job well. So believe me when I say this, you can do this.”

There was a flicker in Seth’s eyes, then I felt something warm and wet on my palm and I quickly pulled away from him.

“Ew! Did you just lick my hand?? Are you five?! Adults don’t do that!”

He was smirking again, cackling as he walked off.

**********

“Baby girl, give me a kiss for good luck. Seemed to have worked for Deano.” Roman caught me from behind in a hug. “You haven’t been giving Seth good luck lately, have you?”

I leaned back as far as I could and barely managed to kiss his stubbly cheek. “No, I have not. I have been giving him pep talks though. Whether he listens or not, I have yet to see any improvement.”

Roman held on to me. “Y/N… That talk we had the other day got me thinking... You’re not still hung up on him, are you?”

“Ro--”

He turned me around, his grip on my arms firm, but not painful. “I’m serious. He’s bad news and he will just use you again if you do.”

I looked down at the emblem on Roman’s chest. “I know. Trust me, I know.” I looked back up at him, placing my hand over his heart. “I’m not going to let him do that. I am a professional and I have a job to do. Even if it is for Seth instead of you and Dean, I am going to do my job to the best of my ability. That means I will give him one hundred percent of my skills.” I smiled. “But not my heart. You guys have that. I won’t lie to you and tell you I don’t still have feelings for him, but I will not let him manipulate me with them. I will not let him destroy us. I promise, Ro.” I looked at the tv screen. “You should get going. Your match is next.”
Roman hugged me again before leaving.

**********

“So...you and Roman?” Seth asked as we watched him descend into the crowd on the monitor. He had joined me at the viewing station despite the fact that he should have been preparing for his match against Randy.

“What about us?” I had a bad feeling about this match. Kane was intense and didn’t even acknowledge me when he passed by on his way to the stage.

“You’re awfully close with him. Always hugging and kissing… You guys dating now?”

“Ew, no. He’s my brother.” I winced as I saw Kane attack Roman just as he cleared the barricades. “Oh, man, that looked painful…”

“Yeah, but not your blood brother. You’re not actually related to him.”

“That doesn’t make him any less my brother. I would bleed for him, gladly. Besides that, he’s happily married, remember?” I kept my eyes on the screen, praying that Roman would be able to turn it around. This wasn’t a match, it was a slaughter. Well, it wasn’t a match at all, since the bell hadn’t been rung.

“Not like it’d be the first time a wrestler has stepped out on his--”

“Don’t even finish that sentence, you ass. Ro isn’t like that and you know it.”

“Such devotion you have…” Seth muttered.

“You had that same devotion once,” I snapped at him. “From me, from Dean, from Roman. So don’t start with me.”

Seth fell silent after that. I breathed a sigh of relief when Roman hurled Kane over the announcer’s table and stood victorious over him.

**********

I stood next to Seth as we waited for his music to start, straightening his belt and brushing back his hair. “Why are you so nervous?” he asked impatiently. I drew my hands away from him, picking up my tablet, ignoring Seth’s indignant huff. I had been nervous since he started his pre-match ritual of squats and handstands. He claimed that it was the best way to warm up his hips and arms. Whatever.

“I don’t know... weird vibe in the air. Daniel giving back his IC title earlier has me on edge, I guess, but it’s probably nothing. Just...be careful, ok? Make it a clean win. Watch your back, Randy likes to spring the RKO when you turn around to face him.”

Seth watched me fidget with my tablet. “Give me a kiss for good luck.”

“What?” It was an unexpected request.

He shrugged and looked away. “You used to do it all the time.”

“That was a long time ago...” I had cherished being able to do that, though he had been engaged at the time. I had never stood a chance with him, but it never stopped how I felt. There were other things to consider now as well, like the girlfriend that we never talked about. “Zahra probably
wouldn’t like it.”

Seth shrugged. “It’s just a good luck kiss. No big deal.”

“I’ll give you one next time, if you have a good match tonight,” I acquiesced. “That means no funny business, got it?”

Seth grinned. “Make it after the match, and you got a deal.”

**********

“Damnit, guys…” The Jays had just “helped” Seth avoid an RKO, ending the match in a disqualification. Seth looked only mildly upset. I watched helplessly as Kane, then Roman and Dean went out there. I expected Kane to help Seth, as Hunter had urged him to do, at the very least to get him out of the fray, but my heart sank as he stood there, chair in hand, doing nothing, watching Randy and my brothers attempt to dismantle Seth.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - May 14, 2015

I smiled and couldn’t believe Roman and Dean. Not the DBZ levels of competition they had going on, the fact that they were just fueling the fire for the whole Ambreigns thing online. I giggled and wondered if they were embracing the bromance/ship or just didn’t care. The egging on Kane bit, I could only shake my head. Typical. I just wished I could still be there with them. I would have kept Dean a bit calmer. I laughed to myself. As calm as possible for him, anyway.

“Something funny, dollface?”

“It’s nothing.” I turned to face Seth. I had every confidence Dean would win his match against Sheamus. “And I’ve told you repeatedly to not call me that. You ready?”

“I was born ready.”

I raised an eyebrow at him, biting my tongue to not mention the time when he “wasn’t ready” to defend his title against Brock. “Well, good. Ryback’s certainly ready for you. Now, when you go out there, you’re going to address the crowd, so try to keep the venom levels within reasonable. Don’t go all ‘I’m a god of wrestling’ out there, is all I’m saying.”

“Fine,” he said, rolling his eyes. “Just my usual levels then.”

“Yeah, traitor, just your usual levels.” Roman draped his arm over my shoulders, appearing out of thin air. “How’s it going, baby girl?”

“Same as usual, I suppose,” I said.

“Why does he get to call you ‘baby girl’, but I’m not allowed to call you ‘dollface’?” Seth demanded.

Roman scoffed at him. “If you can’t figure that one out, you’re dumber than you look.”

Seth snarled at him, turned on his heel and walked away.

“I really wish you wouldn’t antagonize him, Ro.” It was amusing, but Seth ended up pouting after it. Which was also amusing, but made him more difficult to work with.
Roman chuckled. “Hey, I just meant that you’re trying to keep things professional. If he thought I meant something else, that’s his problem.”

**********

I sighed as Seth won his match against Ryback. Another tainted victory. Between Bray’s attack on the Big Guy and the Jays interference on the apron… I sighed a second time.

Seth stayed with the Jays while I watched the rest of the show with Renee, but the action on the screen was hard for me to focus on until Roman’s match with Kane started.

I tried to not be too worried when Kane attacked Roman again before their match started. Dean joined us, his arm around Renee. “He’ll be fine, kiddo. Even if he loses, which he won’t, he’ll be fine for Sunday.”

“It’s not Sunday I’m worried about, Dee.” I loved both of my brothers, but I had always been closer with Roman. I tensed when I saw Kane put him through a table. “Please, Ro…” I whispered.

“Oh, I have to get ready to interview Seth after the match ends,” Renee said, kissing Dean and giving me a hug. “He’ll win, Y/N. You know he will.” She rushed off, leaving me with Dean.

“I know you’re still worried, since he’s your favorite,” Dean said with a smile.

“He’s not my…” Dean gave me a look. “Ok, fine, he’s my favorite. Doesn’t mean I don’t love you though.”

Dean grinned broadly. “Of course you love me, how could you not?”

I shook my head and laughed.

**********

I had followed Renee to her interview with Seth as soon as I saw Roman win his match, though I stayed off camera. *At least he’s not lacking in the confidence, I thought. Never seems to be.* I had once found that admirable. Now it was just annoying.

I saw Renee’s eyes flick past me, and then Dean walked by, right behind Seth and the Jays, with a plate of cookies. I managed to grab one and munched on it as Seth realized Dean was behind him. I nearly choked when Dean asked, very nonchalantly, if they wanted one. I didn’t even blink as Dean attacked Joey with the tray. I almost stepped in to stop Seth from attacking Dean as the Jays held him down, but Roman beat me to the punch by driving a cart into them. I backed up a bit to avoid Jamie running into me, but Dean and Roman made short work out of the trio. *Payback is going to be interesting,* I thought as my two boys stared at the belt Seth had left behind in his hurry to get away.

**********

“Where is it,” Seth demanded, barging into my hotel room. I breathed a sigh of relief when I realized it was just him and that his usual entourage wasn’t in tow. I wasn’t exactly dressed for company when Seth showed up. Roman was staying in the room with me, but had gone out to pick up some dinner, and I didn’t care if he saw me at my worst or vice versa. The man didn’t care if he stunk up the bathroom around me, which was just much too disturbing. The rest of WWE, on the other hand, not so much. I itched to shove Seth out of the room, but didn’t want to draw attention to the fact that I was in my pajamas. He hadn’t seemed to notice yet.
“Calm down. I have it here.” I didn't need to know what he was referring to. Picking up the belt from the other bed, I handed it to him. “There. Now get out.”

Seth relaxed once he had his belt back in his hands, then looked me up and down. “Why, dollface. If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you’re trying to seduce me.”

My face burned with embarrassment as I crossed my arms over my chest in an attempt to hide myself. I was aware of how unsexy I looked with my fluffy monster slippers, yellow and black flannel pajama pants, and an old Metallica t-shirt. At least my face didn't have the mask on it anymore. I had been rinsing off the excess when he knocked. “I didn’t know you were coming, Rollins. I had intended to give it back to you in the morning. If you have checked your text messages, you would know that. If I had known you were on your way, I would have gotten dressed.” Definitely would have at least put on a bra.

Seth leaned in, an idiotic grin on his face. “Isn’t that my shirt? The one I let you borrow ages ago?”

“I don’t recall.” It was. Damn his memory. I loved this shirt. It reminded me of better times. Also, it was super comfortable. Best t-shirt I had ever worn. “But if you say so, it probably is. If you want it back, I can change.” I grabbed the first one I saw, one of Roman’s newest shirts in the merchandise shop. He was supposed to wear it for the next live event, but wouldn't mind me borrowing it first.

“No. It’s fine. Keep it. Looks better on you than it ever did on me.” Seth took the shirt out of my hand. “And you should be wearing my brand anyway, not Roman’s, since you’re my manager and all. I’ll have some stuff sent to you.”

“You don’t have to--”

“Oh, but I do. You’re a representation of me. So, represent.” He flashed me his charming smile. “You know...as good as you look in that shirt--”

The beep of the door lock cut him off, and Roman stepped inside. “Baby girl, I got your favorite--Seth… What are you doing here?”

“He came to get his title belt, and now he’s leaving.” I said firmly. I held out my hand to Roman. “Food. Now. Starving.” I was determined for this to be just a normal thing, even if it was the farthest thing from it.

Roman’s jaw clenched, but he handed me my food with a tight smile and moved out of the way so Seth could pass. “Night, Rollins,” he said in a sing-song kind of voice. I couldn’t see Seth, but I imagined he must have been staring daggers at Roman as he slammed the hotel door shut.
So...I honestly have no idea what a manager would do in this context, and I'm just winging it. Corrections (or suggestions) are appreciated.

**Payback - May 17, 2015**

“Mr. Kane, I would like to be at ringside with you, if that’s ok,” I said. I was wearing Seth's latest shirt at his insistence, though I had altered it into a one of a kind piece of clothing. Seth had liked it, but Stephanie had eyed me and my carpenter pants. She said it was fine just so long as it was only Seth's merch that I wore. I have never been so disappointed to be told I'm allowed to dress comfortably. “I'll walk out with Rollins, and join you at the announcer’s table.”

“Are you going to interfere?” he asked, looking me up and down.

“You know how I feel about him keeping the title on his own merit, sir.”

Kane kept my gaze, then nodded. “Stay out of harm’s way, got it?”

“Yes, sir.”

**********

I wasn’t happy that the Jays were with us, but I followed behind them and Seth as we walked down to the ring. As I promised, I went to stand with Kane. I wanted to throw the Jays out, but I did not have the authority to do so, and I knew that even if he sided against Seth tonight, Kane wasn’t about to throw them out either. *You can do this, Seth. I know you can.* I had refused to give him a good luck kiss, but I wasn’t giving Roman or Dean one either. It didn’t feel fair.

I circled the ring with Kane, keeping away from the action, questioning whether my decision to be ringside was the right one.

“Sir, I hope for both your sake and Rollins that he keeps his championship tonight. I rather like having you around.”

“Do you?”

“Yes, sir. You’re one of the few people that isn’t taking Rollins’ bull, or feeding into it. I hope you don’t interfere, but I will understand if that’s the route you take.”

“Why’s that?” He looked over at me curiously, though he kept glancing at the ring. “You believe he can do this on his own?”

“I do, sir. I really do.”

“Mhmm... You know, you might be the best person for Seth to have around. Ah, but... You should step back. It’s about to get ugly out here.”
I sighed. “Yes, sir.”

The match devolved fairly quickly from there. I was disappointed in Kane’s interference in the fatal four-way. The Jays I had expected it from, but I had hoped for Kane to take the higher path. I was surprised when I saw Seth slip back into old habits, and call for the triple powerbomb. I was even more surprised when I saw Roman and Dean cooperate to send Randy through the announcer’s table. I gasped at the sight, one I had never expected to see again. My boys...together. It was short lived, as was to be expected. I had to cover my mouth so that no one could see me laugh at Seth’s face once he realized his mistake of trying to do the old Shield fist bump. He was an idiot, but he was my idiot. They all were. Roman and Dean tried to do the powerbomb on Seth, but ended up doing it on Kane while Seth was laying on the table. It took two tries, but the announcer’s table finally broke, and Kane lay there on top of Seth.

I giggled as I saw Roman and Dean looking around and trying to decide on how to proceed. “Probably agreeing that loser buys the beer,” I muttered to myself, still covering my smile with my hand. “Idiots. I’ll buy you beers no matter what.” Watching them fight is surreal, no matter when or where. They both respect the other, and it’s fun for them. I loved to watch them spar. This was just a step up.

Seth managed to stop Roman from pinning Dean, but that wasn’t the end of it. The Jays got back in the mix and I felt more than a lot of satisfaction when they got RKOed. Seth won by using Hunter’s Pedigree move. I didn’t like it, but I suppose I can’t complain too much. He did win, and without direct interference, but... It just didn’t feel right. I moved to meet Seth, but Hunter came down the ramp, picking Seth up and raising his arm. Seth’s gaze flickered towards me, but in the end, he stayed with Hunter.

**********

Back at the hotel, I treated Roman and Dean to a match well fought, buying them each a pack of their favorite beers, some pizza, and plenty of ice packs. I wished Seth could have joined us, but Hunter and Stephanie had whisked him away, telling me I wasn’t needed for the remainder of the night. Dean probably would not have been very welcoming either.

“You did good out there,” Renee was telling Dean, giving him soft little kisses on his bruises. He was blissfully happy.

“I’m gonna get a toothache from you two,” Roman joked.

“They’ve got nothing on you and little JoJo,” I said, elbowing him in the ribs. “How’s my girl?”

“Doing good. Wanna see the pictures the wifey sent me?”

“Oh...do trees grow in a forest? Yeah!”

We all crowded around Roman’s phone as we ooo’ed and awww’ed over his daughter.

^v^v^v^v^v

Raw - May 18, 2015

I stood with Kane as Stephanie and Hunter announced that he and I would be in charge of Seth’s new marketing campaign. It was an honor for both of us. “Thank you, Stephanie. I will strive to exceed your expectations. Architect Of A Dream. It’s...It’s catchy.” And so far from the truth. He’ll be an architect of his own downfall if I can’t get him to shape up.
“I know that Seth and I have had our problems,” Kane said, his hand on my shoulder, “and I know Y/N has been doing her best to keep him in line, but last night, I saw a new side of him. I really think that Seth had grown up.”

“Yeah!” Seth drawled loudly, cackling and holding up a champagne bottle as he walked in with the Jays. They handed everyone flutes and Seth started pouring for everyone. “So much to celebrate! Champagne for everyone!” He paused when he got to Kane.

“Rollins…” I growled under my breath, hoping only he heard me. He glanced at me, then smiled broadly.

“You know what Kane, actually, no one deserves this more than you. Well, maybe my lovely manager.” He poured us both some champagne, despite the fact that I don’t drink the stuff, but I suppose it was natural that he had forgotten. I really thought he would have let it go at that. I really should have known better. Kane was about to take a drink when Seth continued speaking to Kane, “Because after last night, I saved your job, and you finally got something to celebrate!” He cackled some more, getting pats on the back from the Jays while Stephanie and I looked at him in disappointment. At least we agreed on some things, I suppose. I wondered how much the champagne cost, because if I was going to throw it on him, I wanted it to be worth a pretty penny. Seth’s laughter was cut short, as Dean walked up to stand in between Kane and me.

“Hey! Congratulations, Seth! And it only took, what? Four other guys to help you do it? That’s a new record for you, man.” I coughed to cover my snort of laughter. Seth glared daggers at me, but I couldn’t help it. “Anyway,” Dean continued, “Now is the time that we can reassess the scorecard. Last time we fought, one on one, I beat you. And last night, at Payback, you couldn’t beat me. So I’ll tell you what I’m going to do. In two weeks, at Elimination Chamber, I’m going to grant you a rematch. On the condition that you put up your title.” Dean’s smirk was well deserved, but I knew there was no way Seth would agree to that, meaning I wouldn’t be able to make the match, and no one else in the Authority would do it either. Unless they were properly egged on.

Hunter and Stephanie laughed and left the situation to Kane.

“Nice try, Ambrose. I don’t know what you don’t understand about back of the line, but that’s where you, Roman and Randy are, in regards to my title. Tell ‘em, Kane.”

Kane looked annoyed, but smiled regardless. “Mr. Ambrose, after careful consideration, I have decided it’s up to the champion to decide his future, because after all, Seth is the future.”

Seth cackled again. “There you go. Oh, and when you find the back of the line, say hi to Roman and Randy for me.” He turned on his heel, “Let’s go, boys!” The Jays followed Seth, laughing their little, obnoxious heads off. “You coming, dollface?” I didn’t dignify that with an answer.

Dean spoke once Seth was gone. “I always kinda knew you were Seth’s neutered little lapdog, but seeing it in person… breaks my heart. You used to be a monster, man! What would Paul Bearer think? Or your brother?” Dean was getting into dangerous territory, and I elbowed him in the ribs. He merely nodded at me. Crap, there’s no stopping him on this one. “The Devil’s Favorite Demon...a glorified butler. Shame…”

Kane got in close, his lips curled into a snarl. “Don’t you EVER mention my family.” Dean nodded, obviously not caring about the warning. I wanted to smack him. “You want action? You’re getting it. Tonight. Against Bray Wyatt.”

“Ok!” Dean said with a cheerful shrug, taking Kane’s champagne flute from him and sipping it gracefully, then swishing it around in his mouth. He swallowed it with relish, and looked at Kane.
“You really shouldn’t drink on the clock,” he said, turning to leave with the flute.

Kane almost went after him, but I stilled him with my hand to his arm. “Don’t mind him, Mr. Kane. Here, you can have mine. You really do deserve it, though not for the reason Rollins stated.”

Kane sighed with determination and accepted my offering. “I don’t know how you put up with them. Any of them.”

“It takes practice,” I told him with a smile.

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“I...I vas just tryin’ to help,” Lana sobbed. Rusev had just humiliated her in front of the entire arena, telling her she was the reason he lost his “I Quit” match against Cena the night before. My translation from the internet was a bit sketchy, but I was fairly certain that he had said it. And now he had dumped his long time girlfriend because she spoke the truth.

“Shhh, I know. I know. And I’m sure, somewhere deep... deep down, Rusev knows that, too. But he is a very proud man, Lana,” I said. “More than anyone else I’ve ever known, to be perfectly honest.”

“He had earned dat right,” Lana said fiercely, through her tears.

“Yes, he has. He has been unstoppable. Look, why don’t you go wash your face, dry your tears and take the rest of the night off? I’ll let Mr. Kane know, ok?”

She sniffled. “You are sure?”

“Yes. You go take care of you, got that?” I gave her a small smile and sent her on her way.

I felt a presence beside me. “She ok?” Dolph asked.

“She’ll be fine. I hope.” As a fellow manager, I really wanted her to work it out with Rusev, one way or another.

“Mmhmm... Oh, did you see the match between Dean and Bray?” he asked.

“No, I was with Lana this entire time. Why?”

“Seth’s two knuckleheads interfered. Cost Dean the match. Ref didn’t catch them though.” Dolph shook his head. “Shame. Anyway, I was wondering if you’d like to get some dinner sometime?”

“Thanks, Dolph, but I don’t date wrestlers. No matter how good looking they are,” I said, winking at him. He laughed as I walked away to find Seth.

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“Are you kidding me?!” I shouted at Seth. The Jays moved to intercept me, but a hard glare had them frozen in their tracks. “I. Fucking. Dare you,” I growled. They looked at Seth, who gave them a nod to leave.

Once they were gone, he said, almost apologetically, “Look, dollface--”

I slapped him as hard as I could, stunning him. “No. You look. I am trying my best to make sure you’re one of the greatest wrestlers ever known, and you’re pulling these cheap stunts, undermining both my work and your own! You need to grow up, Seth,” I said, pleading with him.
“I know you have what it takes to be the absolute best there ever was… but no one is going to take you seriously if you continue these childish antics.”

I turned around and left, Seth not saying a word.

**********

“Oh my goodness,” I heard Renee say as she watched the tv screen. My own jaw had dropped as I saw Lana walk towards the ring. Dolph looked confused by interested. “Oh. My. Goodness,” she exclaimed as Lana laid a soft kiss on Dolph’s lips. “Wow. I didn’t think she’d ever leave Rusev. I mean...this does mean she’s leaving Rusev, doesn’t it?”

“I don’t know?” I asked. Lana had some strange ideas sometimes. “Maybe.”

“Oh. She’s doing it again.” Lana had been egged on by the crowd’s chants of One more time. Sometimes I really hated the audience. This had Bad Idea written all over it.

“There goes Rusev,” I said with a sigh. “Ouch, and there goes Ziggler… Poor Dolph. I can’t believe Lana dragged him into this-- Oh. Nice one, Dolph.” He had surprised Rusev from behind with a Zigzag while Rusev was distracted by screaming at Lana. It ended with Dolph escorting Lana from the ring. “Well, really glad I didn’t accept his offer to go out. Would have been so awkward.”

Renee laughed. “You and Dolph? I could see it. You’d make a cute couple.”

I snorted. “He’s got a wandering eye, Rini. I’d be worried he was seeing someone else the entire time, even if he wasn’t. Besides, you know my dating policy. No wrestlers.”

“Not even champions with a blond streak?” she asked with a grin.

I laughed. “Especially not them.”

**********

I had a hard time looking at Seth. He was gorgeous in general, but dressed in that suit… Damn, boy. He smirked at me, and leaned over to whisper in my ear, “You look great, dollface.” I was dressed much nicer than usual, more like Stephanie or Lana, and it was incredibly uncomfortable. I don't know how they did it on a regular basis. I preferred my usual loose pants, altered t-shirts and sneakers, but neither Stephanie nor Hunter would let me wear it for this “occasion”.

I stayed to the side of Kane as Stephanie introduced Seth as “the Architect of a Dream.” Gag me with a rusty spoon, I thought. I had to agree with Michael Cole when he asked if this was a bit much. It really was. I was still pissed at him for sending the Jays to mess with Dean. I wanted to roll my eyes when Hunter said he saw himself in Seth. Seth could be so much greater than Hunter, I just knew it.

I stifled a laugh as Hunter asked Kane to say a few words about Seth, about how he really felt about Seth. I had a few things I wanted to say, but there were children in the audience.

Kane, to his credit, said some very tactful truths about what he thought of Seth. It was nice. I couldn’t believe Seth was egging Kane on, asking him if there was anything else he wanted to say to him. He’s asking for it.

I didn’t quite trust that smile of Kane’s, and I held my breath as the video package started, showing Seth as a strong, independant wrestler, not needing the support of the Authority, but I nearly broke
when the Shield footage began, covering my mouth to stop the gasp as they played the footage of Seth’s betrayal. My heart was hammering in my ears, and my vision tunnelled, focusing on the chair in Seth’s hands, watching as he hit Roman, and then Dean. “Oh god…” I whispered, backing up a bit, my back hitting the ropes. I hadn’t watched it since that day. I refused to. That was the night I lost so much… the noise of the arena was becoming a dull hum. The footage continued, showing more recent events, but all I could see was that awful night. I thought I was going to puke.

Kane had his hand on my shoulder, steadying me. “You alright?” he whispered.

“Sorry… I… It was a bit much for me. It’s a lovely montage, besides the… besides that night,” I told him. It ended, not soon enough as far as I was concerned.

“Sorry. Should have warned you.” He really did seem to mean it. “I was trying to rattle Seth, not you.”

“It’s fine.” It wasn’t, but it would be. I couldn’t wait for this thing to be over. Seth glanced over at me, slightly worried. He looked like he might walk over but Jamie took the microphone next, spouting some nonsense about Seth being an honor to protect. Damn yes men. I truly wished I could fire their asses already. Joey was next, but before he could say anything, Dean’s music played and he made his way down to the ring.

He touched my cheek, winking at me. “You ok, kiddo?” I nodded at him, grateful that he was here, but also worried about this many members of the Authority in the ring with him. I was a neutral party, for all intents and purposes, and even though I had been training with some of the Divas, I was still a civilian. Seth looked like he was ready to murder Dean. He had to have a reason to be out here, and as much as I’d like to think it was for me, I knew it wasn’t. Dean had a plan. Probably a crazy plan, but a plan nonetheless.

“You’ve got a hell of a lot of nerve being here when we’re all here, Ambrose,” Stephanie snarled.

“Sorry I’m late to the loooove fest. I was looking for the perfect Justin Bieber outfit for Seth.” I had to cover my mouth to hide my laughter again. Dean grinned at me. “I’m making you one last offer, Rollins. To face me in a rematch, so long as you put the World Heavyweight Championship on the line.”

Seth glared at him, but smiled. “What don’t you understand, Ambrose? This is my moment. Architect of a Dream, but it must be you that’s dreaming if you think I’ll give you a match. You’re at the back of the line with Roman and Randy.”

“Well, I’m a notorious line jumper!” Dean said. His grin faded to a hard line. “I want my championship match. Or else.”

“Who do you think you are coming into this ring and making championship demands?” Stephanie asked. “As a matter of fact, you lost one. Just last night. But I’ll tell you what. Seth is a fighting champion, and he won’t be intimidated your threats. So…Seth. Get him.”

I’m not sure what Stephanie expected. Seth was in a suit, a very nice one, but not one that was built for wrestling. Of course he wouldn’t want to fight Dean in it, and I couldn’t blame him. He was hesitant, but with Hunter and the rest of the Authority encouraging him, he started to take off his jacket.

“Seth, you don’t need to--” My words were cut off, lost as Seth attacked Dean. The Jays tried to jump in to help, but Seth and Dean rolled out of the ring, taking the fight to the outside. I sighed and leaned on the ropes, watching them. Dean was cleaning house. It was odd. It was almost like
he was leading Seth over to… He flipped Seth over the announcer’s table and sent the Jays into the bell ringer’s area. He grabbed a black cloth, revealing a stack of cinder blocks with a flourish and dragged Seth over to it. Payback for what Seth had done to Dean months ago. No! I knew Seth deserved it, but damnit, he’s my client! “Dean!”

“Stay out of this, Y/N!” Dean yelled. I couldn't hold my tongue. Dean knew what he’s doing. He’s like Deadpool. It may not make sense, but there was an order to his chaos. But that was my client. I rolled out of the ring and approached Dean slowly.

“Dean, let him go!” Stephanie tried to cajole, using her even tempered voice as Dean held Seth down on the cinder blocks, a chair held high above him, ready to swing down on his former friend.

“Dean,” I said calmly. “Look at me, do you really want to do this? Do to him exactly what he did to you? It won't make things any easier.” I edged closer to him, hoping he wouldn't notice.

“Probably not, but it'll make me feel a whole lot better! And bonus, if he's not champion, that means you won't be tied to him anymore.” Dean said it so simply, I couldn't help but smile just a little bit.

“That's true. But it's my job to help him. And right now I need to help him, wouldn't you say?” I asked. I was nearly close enough to grab him.

“He doesn't deserve your help, your consideration! He betrayed you just as he betrayed me and Roman! Why do you want to help him?”

I couldn't answer. It was so cheesy. Because I believe in the Shield. Dean would question my sanity, and honestly, sometimes I questioned it myself. Dean had had enough and raised the chair high above Seth again.

“Let him go, and you’ve got the match! Just let him go! Let him go.” Stephanie was beside herself with worry.

Dean yelled, “Deal!” but after some minor taunting, raised the chair as if to hit Seth. Whether he was going to or not, Joey stopped him, with Jamie following up, but Dean took them both out, sending Jamie right into Joey and Kane. He went after Seth again, who tried to hide behind me, but Dean merely picked me up and set me to the side. “Get out of the way, kiddo. And whatever happens, do not step in front of us. In fact, get out of here. Walk away.” I did as he said. Roman and Dean would have words for me later if I stayed in harm’s way. I was already going to get an earful for what I had done.

Seth fell, frantically crawling across the other edge of the ring, where Hunter tried to pull him to safety, but Dean pulled him back in. The Jays stopped him, and earned being thrown into the ring posts for their efforts. It was Kane who stopped Dean cold, with a big boot to his chest, and then a chokehold, but Dean wasn’t out yet. He took out Kane, only to be ambushed by Seth. I had to turn away. It was one thing to see them compete in the ring. It was a completely different thing to see Seth completely lose it on Dean. If I kept watching, I would have stepped in between them, my safety be damned. I had to trust that Dean could handle what he had brought down upon himself. I had to. Kane was beside me, making sure I walked out of the arena. My arms folded tightly around me. I was going to need a good stiff drink tonight.

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“Are you insane??” I yelled at Dean once we were at the hotel for the night. Roman had gone off to call his wife and daughter, and Renee was still on her way to the hotel, so it was just me and
Dean. “Dee...I cannot believe you sometimes!”

He shrugged. “Hey, I knew what I wanted, what I deserve, no matter what they say, and I took it. I don’t see the problem.”

I wanted to strangle him. “The problem is that you are not just poking the hornet’s nest, you’re pulling it down and stomping on it. I can’t interfere on your behalf anymore. Stephanie threatened to fire me over tonight, for ‘siding’ with you.”

“She what?!” Dean shouted, jumping to his feet.

“Please calm down. She didn’t. Rollins convinced her not to.”

Dean snorted. “I bet you liked that.”

“And what is that supposed to mean?”

Dean glared at me. “It means you want to be with him. You still have feelings for him, and you’ll betray us the same way he did.”

“Dean! I wouldn’t!”

“No? Then why try to interfere tonight? You were trying to save him! Not me!”

“Dee! It is my job to save him! To look after him, to protect his interests. You going after him with a steel chair and cinder blocks would qualify as a situation I need to save him from! And for the record, I was trying to save both of you numskulls! If I hadn’t been, I would have walked out of there a lot sooner. Or taken that chair from you and beat you over the head with it. I was trying to keep it all under control and you were having none of it! I was doing the best I could with a bad situation!”

Dean looked furious. Roman had come back in, but was wisely staying out of the argument.

“Dee…” I felt so tired. “I love you. You know I do. But you know I… I have to do my job. And yes, I do still have feelings for Seth. I don’t think I’ll ever not have feelings for him, but Dee… I know my place. He can’t manipulate me using them. I know I am just a tool for him to use, like Kane or the Jays, and I know at some point, he will decide that I shouldn’t be his manager anymore. I will not fight him on it when that time comes, but it hasn’t come yet. I will give him all of my efforts, because that’s who I am.” I really didn’t want to mention my secret hope.

Dean breathed heavily, his hands on his hips. “Well… I guess… I guess I have to trust you.” He gave me a small smile and then a tight hug. “You really are too good for him, you know.” I chuckled and rolled my eyes. We both heard Roman go Aawwwwww! and then were enveloped in a Samoan hug.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - May 21, 2015

I watched Roman speak to the crowd, laughing as he joked about punching tiny security guards in the mouth. I loved seeing him punch the Jays, nearly as much as he loved punching them. Dean soon joined him, right after he announced he’d be entering the Money In The Bank ladder match, and I felt my heart lift as they bantered back and forth. “Please, for once, think of an exit strategy,” Roman begged Dean, referring to Dean’s plan on the last Raw. I had to admit, Dean never really considered how he would get out of things. Usually Seth or I thought that stuff up. Well, once upon
“They’re about to get their asses handed to them,” Seth said, sitting down next to me.

“They can handle themselves.”

Seth watched me for a bit. “Haven’t really seen you since Monday.” I had been in his presence but hadn’t given him the opportunity to really talk. “You ok?”

“I’m fine.” I was not, but if I started in on Seth, it was not going to end well. I was trying to calm down a bit more before talking to him, but it had been three days already.

Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Seth’s fist clench. “No, you’re not.”

“Stop. You don’t want to do this. Not right now,” I said. Seth ignored me.

“You’re still upset about what happened on Monday.”

“Why would I be upset, Rollins? It’s not like you beat up one of my best friends, a man I consider my brother, completely unleashing all of your pent up anger on him.” I shook my head in disgust. “I know Dean isn’t blameless in the interaction, and we exchanged quite a few words over it, but damnit, Rollins! The line I mentioned that you shouldn’t cross?! You didn’t have to go that far!”

The vein in Seth's forehead was pulsating slightly. “I'll go as far as I have to. No one is taking this championship away from me. Not Dean, not Roman, not anyone! I have worked too damn hard and sacrificed so much for it. I will do anything to keep it at my side.”

I clenched my jaw. Why must all the men in my life be so stubbornly aggravating? “Fine. But pull that crap again, and I will stop it at all costs. Even if I have to physically separate you to do it.”

Seth frowned. “You’ll get hurt.”

“I. Don’t. Care. I’d rather be hurt than see you all at each other’s throats.” I sincerely hoped he believed me, because I had every intention of following through. I had lost Seth once. I don’t know what possessed him to request for me to be his manager, and I certainly didn’t appreciate it at the time, but now that I saw it as an opportunity to heal old wounds, I didn’t want to let it slip away. I wouldn’t let his idiocy get in the way of a possible redemption if I could prevent it.

**********

“So...Paige is back?” Renee asked me. I was checking Seth’s schedule against the general one the company had posted for the month, entering some minor changes onto my tablet. Seth had been angry with my attitude, and had “gone for a walk.” Whatever.

“Seems like. Why?”

“Well, I heard she and Dean--”

“You really shouldn’t listen to rumors,” I said. “They’re not interested in each other like that. In fact, they’re barely friends. I think the rumors were based off of some rando picture that appeared on a wrestling site. You know how sexually charged Paige tends to be. Combine that with how private Dean is, and...the stories just grew from practically nothing.”

“You’re sure--”

“I’m sure, Rini. Dean’s crazy about you, and only you. Now, why don’t you go find him, kiss the
stuffing out of him, and make sure he’s ready for his match later?”

Renee grinned and grabbed my hand. “How about we go together? He’ll never know what hit him.”

**********

“Oh my goodness,” I said as Axel and Mandow walked by us. “They’re still doing that Mega Powers thing?” Axelmania and Macho Mandow…it was creepy.

Roman laughed. “What do you mean still? They barely started a few weeks ago.”

“It feels like it’s been going on forever,” I said sheepishly. “Guess I’m not the biggest fan.”

It was Dean’s turn to laugh. “No big, kiddo. Just so long as you never get tired of us.”

“Like that would ever happen,” Renee snorted. “She’s in love with all of us.”

I rolled my eyes. Roman nearly doubled over in laughter and Dean said, “Oh, yeah, completely head over heels. Oh look, and there’s the heel to prove it.”

“Y/N! Come on, Stephanie wants to talk to us,” Seth said, walking up to us.

“Good luck on your match later.” I quickly kissed Dean, and then Renee and Roman, on the cheek before Seth grabbed my arm and dragged me out of there.

**********

“I thought you said Stephanie wanted to talk to us?” I asked, as we walked down the hallway away from everyone and everything, including Steph’s office.

“I lied. I just needed you to come with me.”

“Rollins!”

“Don’t ‘Rollins’ me. You were getting too chummy with the enemy back there. Or have you forgotten that they’re both aiming for my title,” Seth snarled. “Or maybe that’s what you want. For one of them to take it from me. Then you can go back to being a little clique again. A little family. Certainly seemed like it during your little exchange with him on Monday.”

“Hey…” I said, reaching for him. He snatched his arm away, but I persisted until I caught his wrist. He could have easily shoved me aside, but he let me take his hand and guide him to a nearby bench. “Of course I want to be with them. As you said, they’re my family…” I wanted to tell him he had been family, too, just in a different way from Roman or Dean. I couldn’t. The words stuck in my mouth, refusing to leave. “But Seth… I would never betray you like that. As long as you are my client, I will work hard to make sure you get the recognition you deserve.”

Seth stayed quiet, his grip on his title belt threatening to break it in half.

“You don’t believe me, do you?” I asked. It hurt more than I expected. Even more than Dean accusing me of betraying him.

“I want to,” he whispered. “I thought if you were with me again, you would see that we could be at the top. But you only talk about putting me at the top. Like you don’t intend to stick around once it happens.”
“I’m not going anywhere, Rollins.” At least not until you decide to give me the boot. “I mean, Steph’s got me in a contract, after all,” I said in a lame attempt at a joke. Seth almost cracked a smile, but the grip on his title lessened, and that was enough for me. My heart broke a little. Seth was far from the man I had first fallen for, grasping at what he could, coveting the title as if it gave him life. I stood up in front of him. “Seth, I believe in you. I know you will persevere, whether I’m with you or not,” I said, leaning down and kissing his forehead. “And no matter what happens, whatever you do, as long as I am your manager, I will stand by your side. I swear it. I will probably mock you if it’s something dumb though.”

“Wouldn't expect any less from you,” he said with a dark chuckle.

**********

“I’m not entirely certain what you expected,” I said to Seth as Dean’s music hit the speakers in victory. The Jays had attempted to interfere with Dean and Bray’s match, but Roman had squashed their attempt and their stupid faces. Seth had almost joined in, but turned around when Roman made his appearance.

Seth glared at me, then went back to shouting at Dean, telling him he’d never get the title. I merely sighed and watched them bicker. He better not make me regret my promise.
Dean and the Police

Raw - May 25, 2015, Memorial Day

The video package of the superstars repeating the words of President Regan made me smile sadly. It was so poetic, so noble… It was a speech that gave me hope. When it ended, and the audience stood in silence for the memories of those who had fought, I wanted to weep a little. So moving… I took a deep breathe once the show was ready to start. Here we go…

**********

Less than a week until Elimination Chamber, and my nerves were on edge. I was restless as I walked with Seth and the other Authority members down to the ring. I stayed behind the small crowd, near Kane, rolling my eyes as Seth described Dean as thug who “intimidated and extorted” his chance at the title shot. The crowd started chanting “You sold out” at Seth and then “We want Ambrose.” I giggled. Kane noticed, but didn’t draw attention to it, smiling at me. His animosity towards Seth did not extend towards me, thankfully. Seth went on to explain that Dean didn’t deserve the match, and that Steph and Hunter were well within their rights to take it away, maybe even fire him. The crowd really got fired up at that, if the chants getting louder were any indication. “But, in my benevolence, I asked that they not do that.” Sure, his benevolence. That and I may have convinced Kane to goad Seth into accepting the match. He was happy to help.

My smile fell when Hunter mentioned that Dean could keep his match, all he had to do was come down to the ring and sign a contract. Kane looked annoyed, and the Jays were pleased with the turn of events. No… It’s a trap. Damnit, Dean, you know it is and you’re going to come down anyway, aren’t you?

Dean’s music hit the speakers. So predictable. Please tell me you have an exit strategy this time!! He sauntered out, but stayed on the ramp. “You may find this surprising, but I think there’s something wrong with me,” he said. Everyone laughed. “I can’t sleep as of late, and counting sheep does me no good, so instead, I count punching Seth Rollins in the face. I imagine knocking his teeth out, one by one,” he said, grinning. “By the time I get to two hundred punches, I’m sleeping like a baaaaaa-thea.”

The crowd really loved that. Seth did not.

“Once I win that championship, there’s gonna be some changes around here!” Dean was so gleeful. “For starters, J & J Security is going to go barefoot, like a couple of respectable hobbits. And Kane, you get to get out of those cheap suits, and wear a collar like the good little lapdog you are.” I raised my eyebrow at that. Dean was too far away to notice. “And my lovely Y/N, you’re perfect the way you are, but you won’t be chained to the one that drunk dials Selena Gomez anymore. That’s right, our own little Justin Bieber, Seth Rollins. You will be free of him, kiddo, and free to be with your true brothers.” I shook my head at him, but the camera was on me and the entire audience saw my slight amusement as I leaned against the ropes.

“You shut your mouth, Ambrose!” Seth shouted into the mic. The vein in his head was throbbing again. The crowd started chanting Justin Bieber at him, which really didn’t help his mood. “Hey! Hey! People! When are you going to get it? You called me a sellout, and you act like I wasn’t proud of it.” My grip on the rope tightened. “Now you’re calling me Justin Bieber like it’s an insult? Why do you call me that? He’s rich, famous, has to beat women off with a stick, and you all wish you could be as successful as him, just like Dean Ambrose wishes he could be me. The problem with that, Deano, is that you will never be me. You’re just a little cockroach. And the
thing about them is that they’re good at surviving, but they never thrive. Like you. You’ll never thrive, and you will never beat me. So if you’re brave enough to sign that contract, then I will happily scrap your teeth off the bottom of my boot in Elimination Chamber. Come on down to the ring, and sign on the dotted line. I dare ya.”

I bore holes into Dean’s head with my stare. Hoe… Don’t do it… He didn’t notice at all.

“Well, I’d rather be a cockroach than the wrong end of the Authority’s human centipede. And all I gotta do is walk down to the ring, step into that lion’s’ den, and sign that contract. Well, it may be stupid, and reckless, even crazy… but it might be worth a shot. Only one way to find out.” Dean dropped the mike and peeled off his jacket as he made his way down the ramp.

You crazy bastard. Dean had already warned me to not get in between him and Seth again. “You gotta do what you gotta do, and I respect that. But I gotta do what I gotta do, got it, kiddo?” I didn’t like it, but it did make it easier to do my job. Plus, Seth had given me the same warning.

Dean was circling the ring, watching for an opening while the Authority acted like a bunch of sharks drawing in for the kill. I stepped to the back, wishing there was something I could do to help Dean. Roman’s music started playing, and he made his way down to the ring through the audience to the cheers of the crowd. The calvary has arrived.

Stephanie did not appreciate that. Once Roman was at Dean’s side, she took the mike and announced that Dean had until the end of the night to sign his contract, and that he and Roman would be in a tag team match against Kane...and Seth. Fun times, I thought with a groan.

**********

I stood in a neutral corner of the ring, the Jays standing in Seth and Kane’s corner, and no one standing in Dean and Roman’s corner. I hated it, but Stephanie said I had to stay out there. It was a fairly even match, going back and forth between the two sides, until the Jays caused a distraction, allowing Seth to gain the upperhand. Kane added in some blows to Roman when the ref’s back was turned and threw him back into the ring, right into a pin. He managed to kick out, and, after a few more exchanged blows, was finally able to tag Dean. Dean let loose on Seth, and was successful for a bit, but a misstep gave Seth the advantage. I gripped the edge of the ring, squeezing my eyes shut, praying that no one noticed. Not again, please, not again… I wasn’t even completely sure of what I was hoping for and couldn’t open my eyes, not until I heard the crowd chant the three-count and the bell rang.

Dean had pinned Seth! I wasn’t sure what to feel. I wanted to be happy, Dean had won! But on the other hand, Seth had lost. He was livid, screaming at the ref, arguing over the count. I drew a shaky breath and got his title belt, following him, Kane and the Jays backstage as Roman and Dean taunted him.

**********

“Where are the Jays?” I asked.

“Dunno. Said they had to go talk to Hunter, he wants them to run an errand or something. Why?” Seth looked up at me from the couch he was lounging on. As the Authority’s posterboy, he was allowed to use their executive lounge whenever he wanted. Stephanie had informed me that I was not to stay too long in there, even with Seth as a “chaperone”, and had given me time limits that needed to be adhered to. The security guard outside the door kindly reminded me of that fact.

“I don’t like not knowing where they are. I don’t trust them.” He moved his legs so that I could sit
beside him. “I really don’t understand why you do.” He moved his legs back over my lap, pinning me in place.

“Dollface, they’re ok guys. Fun to talk to, find me hilarious, always got my back.” He settled into the couch, his head on the armrest, his eyes closed. “You should let loose a little more, go out with us. Have some fun. We’re going to go to the club later, and before you get mad at me, it’s just for a couple of hours.”

I had been about to get after him. “Well, excuse me, I’m concerned over your health, Rollins. Staying out late, going to clubs, that’s the stuff that gets people in trouble. You need rest, downtime.”

“I get plenty of rest, I eat well, I exercise constantly.” He lifted his shirt to show off his abs. “Could bounce a quarter off my stomach.”

I looked away, hiding my blush. Why did I still have such strong feelings towards him? Physically, emotionally. I knew better, yet I couldn’t shake it. “Still…”

“Come out with us,” he said, “You can get to know the guys a little better. Even better, you can be my… Be my guardian. Make sure I don’t get into any trouble.” His head was still tilted back, his eyes closed.

I pushed his legs off of my lap gently. My time in the lounge was up. “I’m sure you’ve forgotten what day it is, but I already have plans tonight. Stay out of trouble, Rollins. And if you get into trouble, you have my number.”

He grabbed my wrist as I tried to pass, opening one eye to look at me. “Why are you so resistant to us clicking together as a team?”

“I don’t trust easily,” I said, sliding my gaze away from him to stare at the door. “Not anymore.”

Seth let go of my wrist as if it burned him, and I walked out the door before the security guard could come drag me out.

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“Dee!” I screamed, but Seth caught me by the waist. I could only stare in horror as Dean was dragged away in handcuffs by the cops. I had been looking for him, only to find this happening.

“Dollface, let it go. He assaulted one of the cameramen, and the guy is pressing charges.”

“What? No… Dean wouldn’t do that… Not on purpose…” I had heard about what happened. The Jays had picked a fight, I could only assume that was the errand they had been sent on earlier, and Dean had inadvertently punched a cameraman in the scuffle. “What did you do?” I asked Seth in a hard voice. His grip on me tightened, pulling me closer to him.

“Nothing that he didn’t have coming to him,” he hissed in my ear. “No one made him hit that guy, though Hunter may have encouraged the man to press the charges. If Dean hadn’t hit him in the first place, he wouldn’t be in this predicament.”

I struggled against Seth, but he was too strong. Dean looked back at me from the cops’ car, and winked.

“Make sure you lock him up tight, officers!” Jamie yelled, suddenly appearing with Joey and Kane at his side.
“Yeah! He’s more animal than man!” Seth chimed in. I glared at him, but he ignored me, letting me go so he could chest bump with Jamie.

**********

I couldn’t deal with Seth after that. Luckily, he didn’t push for me to stay with him. “Sometimes, it feels like one step forward with him, five steps back.” I told Renee.

“Hey, Dean will be ok. He’s scrappy. Rawr, is he scrappy,” Renee said with a wink. I giggled.

“I know. He’s a survivor. Doesn’t stop me from worrying.” I looked over at her. “Can you really say you aren’t worried about him at this moment?”

Renee sighed and rolled her eyes. “No. I can’t. Tell you what, I’ll go poke around at the bosses and see if I can find out anything. Got earn my paycheck, might as well look out for my boo.”

She came back fifteen minutes later with a grim look on her face. “Not good. They’re patting themselves on the back, fully expecting that Dean won’t be making it back in time. They’ll be in the ring at the end of the night, but if Dean’s not here…”

I growled. “Not if I have anything to say about it. I’ll be back, Rini. Cover for me?”

“Of course.”

**********

Renee kept me updated on what was happening in the arena as I took a cab to the station where Dean was being held. It was mostly snide remarks about the Authority’s “victory.” But then...

Rini: omg. you have to see this.

A video link was attached to the message. I watched in horror as I saw another angle of the “assault” that Dean was being charged with. Seth had been caught pushing the poor cameraman into Dean, causing Dean to turn around and hit him, probably thinking it was Seth trying to attack him from behind. He was right, though it was by proxy.

“Fifty bucks extra for you if you can get me there in the next ten minutes,” I told the driver, turning back to my phone to answer Renee.

Me: Stall, do whatever you can. Get Roman to help if you need to.

**********

“Dee...this is nuts.” I had just gotten him out of jail and he was asking if he could borrow a police van.

“Hey, it’s not like I’m stealing it. I’m borrowing it. With permission.” The desk sergeant had turned out to be very sympathetic and was a fan of Dean. Not just him, a lot of the officers on duty were fans. They had been taking pictures with Dean when I arrived. The desk sergeant even agreed to keep my involvement of the release a secret. Seth was going to blow a gasket if he found out. I had shown the officer the video, and since Dean hadn’t been processed yet, it only took a few signed forms to get him out. “You’re going to have to exit the vehicle before anyone sees you, but no worries. We got this, kiddo.”

I shook my head, but buckled in for the insane ride ahead of me. There wasn’t much time left
before the show ended and Dean’s chance at the belt was gone.

“Hey, you’re just in time,” Renee said. She and Paige were watching the tv monitor together with a few of the male superstars. Dolph and Lana were curled up together, as Lana iced Dolph’s jaw from an attack by Rusev earlier.

On the screen, I could see Dean driving the “borrowed” police van. He exploded onto the scene, evening the odds against Roman, who had been barely holding his own against Kane, the Jays and Seth.

“Shouldn’t you be out there helping Seth?” Natalya asked me, startling me with her presence.

“Help him with what? He made this bed. He can lie in it.” I might have been a bit angry still.

“Ouch, that’s ice cold.” Paige wrapped her arm around my shoulders. “You know, I could use a fierce chick like you by my side. That triple threat match I have coming up is going to be rough.”

I grinned at her. “If only I could, Paige. Stephanie has me in an iron clad contract. Rollins is my one and only priority.” Paige shrugged, but we all continued to watch together. Between Dean and Roman, they managed to drive the Authority out, leaving them alone in the ring with the contract.

I smiled as Roman handed Dean the clipboard, and Dean happily, if a little violently, signed on the signature line. I will not be forgetting it anytime soon.

“Ro…” I said. “Why are we here?”

When I had told Seth I already had plans, I had been referring to Roman’s birthday celebration. I had not expected it to be at a club, and had definitely not expected it to be the club Seth had intended to go to. He was ignoring us at the moment, but I could feel him staring at my back every so often.

“They have half-off drinks. And I found a flyer for them at the arena. Not many places near our hotel are open this late, baby girl.” Dean and Renee were swaying together a few feet away from us, to a tune that no one else could hear, and Jey, Jimmy and Naomi were at the pool tables. They all seemed to be having a good time.

I sighed, knowing he was right. “Yeah, I know. I just feel a bit uncomfortable.” I lifted my glass to Roman. “May you have many happy returns of the day.”

He laughed, tapped his glass to mine, and we both drank. “Is it because of Rollins?”

“Partially. But this sort of place isn’t really my scene.” The music was low, but there were still couples on the dance floor, gyrating against one another as if they were having double seizures. Didn’t anyone put effort into dancing anymore?

“Same, but half-priced beers are one hell of an enticement.” He laughed, then smiled at me. “Just have a few drinks, maybe play some pool, and we’ll be out of here soon enough.”

“Ok,” I said, taking a small sip of my beer.
I was trying to concentrate on my shot, having done hilariously bad on every single attempt to hit the darn cue ball with the stupid pool stick so far, when I felt the hand on my back. Dean had been cheating on my behalf, despite being my opponent, but had left to get another pitcher of beer. Renee had chased after when we realized he had left his wallet with her.

“Need some help, darlin’,” Jamie drawled in my ear. I drew myself up and turned around. He was standing a bit too close for my liking, but I was against the edge of the pool table already and couldn't move farther away. Joey was with Seth in a booth across the dance floor from where I stood, talking to some very scantily clad women. Neither was paying attention to what Jamie was doing.

“I'm good, thanks. Maybe you should run back to Rollins before he misses you.” I glanced over to Roman and Jey, who were a few tables over. Jimmy and Naomi were on the dance floor, showing everyone how to really dance at a club. None of them had noticed I was by myself with Jamie. I wasn't sure if this was a good or bad thing yet.

“He'll live without me for a few minutes,” Jamie said, raising his hand to caress my cheek. “You really are enticing, you know that? Such a spitfire…”

The glassy look in his eyes tipped me off. I pushed his hand away. “Don't touch me, Noble.”

“Why not? You let Roman, Dean, and Seth touch you. Or is it different for them since you're their shared toy?” Jamie sneered.

“I’m sorry...what??” I stammered. Surely I had heard him wrong.

Jamie scoffed. “It’s no secret. Everyone knows what went on between you and the Shield behind closed doors. The designated cum bucket, that was your nickname, letting them use you however they wanted, whenever they wanted, wherever they wanted. One, two, even all three of them at once… Is it difficult to service three men, or does it get easier the more you do it? Roman and Dean have other women now, does that mean you play third wheel for them? Wouldn't mind seeing you and the blonde reporter go at it… I know Seth misses that extra special attention you used to give him, and Joey and I can fill in for Roman and Dean. What do you say, darlin’? Do it for Seth's birthday.”

I had grown cold listening to Jamie. How could Seth have told them I serviced him, Roman, and Dean?? I never really considered or even cared how other people saw our bond, but this… And Jamie wanted me to service him… Not just him, but Joey and Seth, too… This was what they thought of me? I pushed past Jamie and ran outside, puking into a nearby trash can. It took a bit to purge the contents of my stomach, but once I was done, I hailed a cab back to the hotel and texted Roman and Dean to let them know I had left. I had never felt so depressed and sick in my life.

I called Stephanie next. “What is it?” she growled into the phone. She sounded out of breath and there were some very suspicious grunting in the background.

I managed to keep my voice even, and not break down into a mess of sobs, though I couldn't help the hoarseness. The crying, at least, could wait for the hotel room. “Stephanie, I want to be removed from the position of the Champion’s manager. In fact, I need some time off. Possibly a hiatus.”

“Oh, well, that can be arranged.” She sounded thrilled. “I will have an answer for you on Thursday at the Smackdown taping. Until then, why don't you take a few days off?”

“Thank you, Stephanie.”
Seth had been blowing up my phone for the past few days, ignoring the only text I sent him to let him know I was taking time off and to not bother me.

When I showed up at the arena for Smackdown, he was waiting for me. “Where the hell have you been?” he demanded.

“I told you, you just chose to ignore it.”

“What happened? Why did you need to take time off? Why did you ask Stephanie to remove you as my manager?” he asked, pulling me to a more private area.

“Because I needed space, Seth!” I half yelled at him. I took a moment to calm myself. “Because I realized that us working together is not a good idea. Because I'm considering…” I stopped. I had been thinking about it during my few days off, but this was the first time I voiced it out loud to anyone. “I'm considering quitting the company altogether,” I said softly. The fight left me as I spoke the words. WWE had been my home for so long, it was sad to think it might be the end for me here, but I needed to start over, away from my brothers, from Seth...somewhere where our names wouldn't be dragged through the mud simply because people misunderstood our bonds. It might have been a bit extreme, but it also felt right, considering the circumstances.

“What…” He looked absolutely stunned. “Why!? Where would you go!?”

“Not sure. Home, for a bit. I had some offers from ROH and NJPW last year. Might try to see if they still want to hire me...Kenny Omega spoke highly of me to management and--”

“No! You can't leave! I still need-- I still need your skills…”

“Rollins. Stephanie has already agreed to release me from my contract. I just need to sign a release form. Starting tomorrow, I will be on hiatus for a month, after which I will make a decision to stay or go.” Seth dropped his title belt on the floor, his jaw working but no sound coming out. I gently closed his jaws with my hand to his chin, then picked up the belt. “You need to be careful with this. It's what you worked so hard for.”

“Why?”

“I don't know, but that's what you keep saying about it--”

“No. Why this change of heart?! You said you would stay with me! No matter what!”

I stiffened at the reminder. “That was before.”

“Before what?” he demanded. I stared at him, not wanting to speak, defying him. He grabbed my shoulders. “If you're going to leave me, to break a promise, I deserve to know why.” Damn him, he was right. I was all about keeping my word, being a damn professional. It was still hard to explain it. “Damnit, Y/N, before what?!”

I took a deep breath, but my voice was still a bit shaky. “Before...before I knew what you told people about us. What you told the Jays about our previous relationship.” I shook my head. “Here's a better question,” I said, jabbing him in the chest. “Why did you lie to them and tell them that crap?”
“What crap?” He looked genuinely confused, but I had been tricked before. I rolled my eyes, trying to ignore the burning sensation of impending tears, willing them to not fall. “The crap about me being the designated cum bucket for the Shield, Rollins! Servicing you three whenever and however you wanted it?” I had spent all of Tuesday crying, thinking I could handle it if I just let it all out. I was wrong. “Is that how you saw me? As someone convenient if you needed sex and couldn't get it!?” Idiot that I was, I would have let Seth use me like that back then if he had asked. I hated that I had once been so foolish, and being reminded of it by Jamie had been a very painful reminder.

“Dollface…”

“Don’t call me that!!” I screamed, shoving him away. The tears were flowing down my face. “Why would you tell them that?! Why would you tell them you missed the special attention I gave you?!”

He looked panicked, like he wanted to hug me, to calm me, but I was ready to claw at him if he did. I didn't want his damn pity. “Y/N, I swear I never said you had sex with us, or any of that stuff… but I did say I missed the special attention you gave me. I was drinking, angry, watching you fawn over Roman… but I meant how you always went above and beyond for me, more than Dean or even Roman… they must have misinterpreted that.” He gingerly placed his hands back on my shoulders. “I never saw you as a convenient lay. You were…and still are… You are someone I admire, someone I would not disrespect like that. Please, you have to believe me.” I looked up into Seth’s eyes. He seemed sincere, and I was already calming down. Letting all that out had been a stress relief I didn’t know I needed. And damn me, I believed him, but I needed to make him work for it.

“You don't exactly have a good track record for truth, Rollins. Give me one good reason I should trust you.”

He stared at me for a moment, then drew me into a hug. He was so warm, I felt myself relax into it, even emitting a happy little sigh. “Because I'm certain I will fall apart without you. Can't afford to drive you off.”

I sighed heavily, but I did feel better about it all. “You won't fall apart without me, but… Fine...I believe you.”

“Will you stay? Please?” His voice rumbled in my ear.

“I need some time… away from work, away from everyone.” I didn't want to leave. I wanted to stay, with him, with Roman, with Dean, with Renee, Natalya and Paige.

“Please...don't leave…”

“You can let go now.” He tightened his grip briefly before letting go. It hurt to push him away, but his proximity would throw off my thoughts. Had been throwing them off, since I nearly promised to not leave him. “I'm sorry, Rollins. I can't promise you anything right now.”

**********

Dean was addressing the crowd, talking about his arrest from Monday. He thankfully kept me out of his story, taking some liberties, but it was more or less what had happened. I heard my name being called and turned to find Stephanie.

“Y/N,” Stephanie said, looking grave. “Hunter and I have decided that it would not be best for
business if you were no longer Seth's manager. You may have some time off, but only a week and only after Elimination Chamber. Got that?"

I nodded, my heart sinking.

**********

“Hey, what’s wrong?” Natalya asked me. I was crushing cans for recycling with my bare hands. My palms hurt, but I was feeling better. It was the only thing I could find to work off my anger.

“Rollins… selfish, little, egotistical son of a...really nice woman, actually… But I can’t believe him!” I slammed another crushed can into the bin and reached for the next one. “She raised him to be better than this!”

“Ok, calm…” Natalya said, taking the next can from my hand. “What happened?”

I told her the short version, keeping out the more personal details. Even if Jamie said everyone knew, I didn’t feel like actually voicing it. I was as vague about it as I possibly could be.

“But, he didn’t know what J & J were saying? And was it both of them, or just one of them?” she asked.

“He swears he didn’t know, and I… I believe him. It was only Jamie that approached me, but considering he and Joey are attached to Rollins’ hips like some mutant conjoined twins…”

Natalya nodded. “Hmmm...and now, he’s blocked you from leaving and getting the space you need. Y/N, I think you might be overreacting a bit. On the leaving part, I mean. Getting angry at Seth is perfectly reasonable. He overstepped his bounds, but, on the other hand, he likely had good intentions, if a bit selfish. From what I’ve seen, you’re someone he cares about, in his own way. He wouldn’t make you stay if he really thought you were unhappy, would he?”

I sighed. “No, he wouldn't. At least, I don't think he would…” I was mostly sure about that.

“If you're really bound and determined to leave, nothing will stop you. You're very stubborn like that. But...I don't think you really want to.” She hugged me. “Whatever you decide, your family and friends will stand by you, ok?”

I hugged her back. “Thanks, Nattie.”

**********

I went in search of Seth after a while. The Jays were with him, of course, but he waved them off. “Before you ask, I already set them straight on...all that crap.” He looked around at the crew, keeping his voice low. “I made sure they hadn’t told anyone else that, but if they did, I will find out.”

“I was actually about to ask if you had anything to do with Stephanie changing her mind about my leave of absence and no longer being your manager.”

Seth looked away, but I saw the guilty look on his face. “Are you going to yell at me if I did?”

I leaned against the wall. I had been thinking about it, well away from the influence of Seth, and after talking to Natalya. She was surprisingly good at advice. Considering he hadn’t told Jamie those lies, and the fact that he had corrected the man on it... “No. I'm upset, but I won't yell at you. I will tell you that you're being selfish by not respecting my wishes, and that I will be making you
pay for it...but, considering…”

He stole a glance at me. I rolled my eyes and sighed melodramatically.

“Considering what day it is… I will give you a pass on the yelling. And I will apologize for trying to get out of being your manager without talking to you about what was bothering me. It’s my gift to you. Happy birthday, Rollins.”

“So...no actual present?” He quirked an eyebrow, a little sad, and I had to laugh.

“Well, I was going to get you a cake, but I would have been tempted to smash it in your face.” I wrinkled my nose at him and he chuckled. “Besides, I don’t know what you like anymore. I didn’t know what to get you.”

He stared at me for a bit, looking very much like the Architect, the man with the plan.

“What,” I said, not really a question. “You’re thinking something.”

He blinked. “Ah, was just thinking that, well...you went out drinking with Roman on his birthday...maybe you could go drinking with me tonight?”

I turned my head. “I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why not?”

“I didn’t exactly have a great time that night. Jamie’s accusations and then his suggestions—”

“What suggestions?” he interrupted.

I looked back at Seth, feeling very tired. “I don’t want to talk about it, Rollins. It’s done, you set them straight, I just want to forget about it.”

“Y/N…”

“Please, just drop it. I don’t want to think about that anymore. Look, if you really want a present, think about what you’d like or want to do, and let me know what it is. I’ll do my best to make it happen.”

“Promise?”

“Yeah, I promise. I will try. You’re not getting anything better than that.”

“Thanks, dollface. I’ll make sure it’s a good one!”

**********

“Baby girl, where’s Rollins?” Roman asked me, coming out of the shadows.

“He needed to go talk to Kane about something. Why? What do you need?”

“Just trying to keep tabs on him, make sure he’s not setting Deano up for anything.” Roman kissed my cheek. “I’d ask for a good luck kiss, but considering we’re all in this match, I know you won’t grant one. So I’m giving you one instead.”

“Trying to rack up some good karma?” I asked, grinning at him. He and Dean had a rematch against Seth and Kane later that night.
He shrugged and laughed. “Can’t hurt.”

**********

“Dollface, give me a good luck kiss,” Seth demanded.

“Not gonna happen, Rollins,” I replied, not looking up. I wasn’t actually busy, just playing a game on my tablet.

“Why not?” I could hear the frown in his voice.

“Because, you’re going up against my brothers. I’m not giving out any good luck to any of you.”

“But I’m your client——”

I held up my hand. “Rollins, don’t even go there. Nowhere in my job description does it say I have to give you a good luck kiss. And let me reiterate, neither Roman nor Dean got one from me either. Doesn’t that make you feel better?” I glanced up at him, grinning.

He snorted. “I guess.”

I sighed and got up from my seat. “Look, why don’t you go do your squats and handstands? Get your head in the match. Plenty of room right here,” I gestured to the area around us, “and I’ll even try to do some handstands with you.”

“You can do handstands?” he asked.

I shrugged. “Sort of. Not well. But, solidarity, right?” He laughed and handed me the title belt to hold while he started.

**********

I stayed in the back for this match. Seth had hugged me tightly, stating similar lines as Roman had, he was just trying to get any little extra luck.

“You don’t need luck, Rollins. Just be the champion I know you are.” I smiled at him, but the fact that the Jays were accompanying him to the ring didn’t give me much hope.

I sat with Natalya, Paige and Renee. They were watching the match on the backstage monitors, but I kept my eyes down, trying to ignore the “omigods” from both Natalya and Renee. Paige didn’t say much.

“Oh. Shit.” Renee was swearing, and that was enough for me to look up and see the complete onslaught as the New Day team ran out to help the Authority. Dean and Roman took them out, but Seth and Kane took it from there, beating down on Dean. Seth’s eyes were frenzied, crazed as his anger took over. I had to walk away from the monitor before I started to cry.

One step forward, five steps back.
“Hey…” Dean said, hugging me from behind. “How you doing, kiddo?” The night was nearly over, his match with Seth was up after the Intercontinental Championship match.

I shrugged. I had been in a mood since Thursday’s Smackdown. Seth had wisely avoided me. There was a moment when he came backstage and saw me that it clicked in his head that he might have gone overboard. The friendship between us was turbulent at best, and I was beginning to wonder if I was wrong about being able to save him from the Authority and himself.

“The traitor do something? Besides what happened on Monday and Thursday?”

“I don't want to talk about it, Dee.”

He contemplated for a moment, then turned me around to face him, lifted me up and hefted me over his shoulder like a sack of potatoes.

“Dee!! Let me down!!” I yelled, kicking and hitting his back with my fists.

“What's that? Feels like a little gust of wind on my back.” He laughed, the jerk. I tried an elbow next, which I know he felt, but he ignored it. I gave up after that, and tried to grab onto stuff to keep him from taking me wherever the hell it was he was taking me. Not one crew member or superstar helped me. They just took one look at Dean and kept on walking. Well, not everyone…

“Hey! Put my manager down!” Seth yelled. I wasn't sure I wanted to be rescued by him of all people. Where was Roman when you needed him?

Dean turned to him, meaning I was no longer facing Seth. “Or what? She may be your manager, but she's my little sister. I have more reason to be holding onto her than you do.” He smacked my ass and I promptly elbowed him in the head.

“Dee…” I growled in warning. He continued to ignore me.

“Put. Her. DOWN.” The anger in Seth’s voice sent bad shivers down my spine.

“No,” Dean said. He sounded like he was smiling. “You don’t deserve her. Never have, never will. See, you made a mistake in betraying your brothers. You made an even bigger mistake in betraying your little sister.” I went still. A guttural sound came from one of them, most likely Seth. “Your mistake gained you so much… You were our family, our blood… Together, we built a juggernaut. Then you went and plunged that knife into our collective backs. Y/N may not have been there in person, but make no mistake on this, she felt the pain of your betrayal just as deeply as me and Roman.” Dean finally put me back on my feet and turned me around, putting his arm around me protectively. I couldn’t look Seth in the eyes, not when Dean was hitting below the emotional belt. “We all watched as your mistake sent you straight to the top. You might not have minded betraying me or Roman, but it’s damn obvious you regret betraying her.”

I glanced up at Dean, the maniacal, gleeful smile on his face told me all I needed to know. He was enjoying this. “Dee...please don’t…” He shushed me.

“I mean, come on. Who wouldn’t? She was the best part of the Shield. Look at this innocent face.” He pinched my cheeks and I slapped his hands. He was still grinning, unfazed by my reactions.
“Why else would you get mommy and daddy to make her your manager? Why else would you go
to such lengths to keep her around when she’d much rather be with her true brothers. You
abandoned her before, and I know you’re going to do it again, traitor. Or maybe...maybe you don’t
regret it, and the reason you’re keeping her at your side is to have some leverage over us… Your
own sister…”

My gaze shot up to Seth. I hadn’t considered that, that he might be using me to get to Roman and
Dean. His expression was unreadable, his voice cold as ice. “She’s not my sister.” My heart began
to sink and my gaze fell to the floor.

“You’re not untouchable, Seth. You can surround yourself with all the suits and sycophants you
want, but it won’t matter. The Tweedles can’t help you. Your big red lapdog can’t even stand you.
And mommy and daddy...they can’t save you. Even mommy and daddy can’t save you. Did you
think a little trip to the clink would stop me? Truth is, Seth, once upon a time, you made a bad
decision. You betrayed your family. And now...I’m going to take everything from you. Your
safety. Your security. Your smile. Your peace of mind. Your well being. And...your WWE World
Heavyweight Championship, and with that, your only link to the past you so desperately want to be
rid of.” I could feel Dean’s gaze on me.

“Five minutes until you go on, Mr. Rollins, Mr. Ambrose,” a crewmember said, running by.

“Good,” Dean said, staring Seth down. “Come on, kiddo. Let’s get ready.”

I looked up at him. “Seth…?” Say something…please…anything. Tell me to stay. Let me know that
I was more than just leverage!

He didn’t look at me at all, just kept staring back at Dean.

“Seth...please look at me…” Nothing. I dropped my gaze again and let Dean guide me away.

**********

I watched the match from backstage, sitting with Roman. It mostly went as I had expected. The
Jays interfered, Kane watched on, not looking particularly worried. Seth and Dean had a pretty
good match, considering everything. Brutal, intense, very them. Neither was holding back, and if
they had been on better terms, I would have enjoyed it a lot more.

“Baby girl, why aren’t you cheering?” Roman asked me. He had just jumped up from his seat as
Dean pinned Seth for a three count, winning the match.

“Because...Dean won, but he’s not the champion.”

“What are you talking about? It was a clean win--”

“No,” I said, shaking my head. Roman had been right next to me, why couldn’t he see it? The first
referee, John Cone, had been knocked out of the ring when Dean had launched himself at Seth. It
had been quick, but I had seen it. Seth had pulled Cone in front of him. I don’t think he did it on
purpose, more like an instinct move. The celebration on the screen was cut short, as Cone argued
with the second referee who had come out to grant Dean the pinfall. Lillian Garcia announced it a
few minutes later. Win by disqualification. Meaning Dean wasn’t champion. “I told you,” I said
sadly.

“Baby girl…” We kept watching as Dean refused to give back the belt, and Seth, the Jays and
Kane began to circle around him. “Shit…”

“Go, Roman. Dean needs you.” I pushed him toward the stage entrance.

“You’ll be ok?” he asked, already backing away. I nodded, though as I watched him run off to
Dean’s rescue, I wondered if I had been telling the truth or lying.

**********

I laughed a little as Roman and Dean made off with the belt, taunting Seth, who kept yelling at them from his perch on the corner post. I would get the belt from them later and return it to Seth, but for now, I let them have the victory.

^v^v^v^v^v

Raw - June 1, 2015

Dean and Roman had been ducking my calls, basically running in the other direction when they saw me. I was a bit annoyed, but I understood. Stephanie and Hunter, on the other hand…well, they were more than a tiny bit upset. I sighed as I walked out with the Authority. Seth hadn’t spoken a word to me still, and I hate saying it, but while I missed talking to him, I didn’t try very hard to get his attention. Dean’s words about Seth using me to get to him and Roman… it was weighing on my mind. I couldn’t even appreciate how funny and cute it was that Seth was pouting over the fact that no one had seen Dean since he absconded with the title belt.

First Stephanie, then Hunter, demanded Dean come down to the ring to return the belt. I could have told them that wouldn’t work. I could see the vein in Hunter’s forehead pulsating as there was still no response from Dean. I froze when Roman’s music hit, and wasn’t sure if I should be happy or scared. I moved to the back of the group, no one noticing me at all, just in case something went down.

Roman descended from the nosebleed seats of the arena, entering the ring to the frowns of everyone in the Authority. He informed them that Dean wasn’t stupid, and that he also wasn’t there. “He’ll give back the title, on the condition that he gets a rematch at the Money In The Bank Pay-per-view,” Roman said. “And not just any match. He wants to make sure there’s no question about who the champion is, so he wants a ladder match. He deserves the rematch, because…well, he did win. Landed a Dirty Deeds and pinned Justin Bieber over here.” He grinned as Seth started to lose it.

“He did not beat me! I am still the WWE World Heavyweight Champion!” Seth yelled into the microphone.

Except…Dean DID win, by disqualification and by pinning you, Seth, I thought to myself.

“Is that what you call yourself?” Roman asked, and the crowd began to chant You got beat! You got beat! Seth really didn't like that. “I mean, the writing is on the wall. Come on… Dean beat you, I beat you. You were maybe a bit cool when you were in the Shield, but now you’re running with mom and dad, and the tiniest security guards I’ve ever seen… You…well, you may be the worst WWE champion of all time. Your only redeeming quality is that you have good tastes in managers. Hey, baby girl.” Roman nodded at me.

I could feel Stephanie glaring at me, but I kept my eyes on Roman, giving him a tight smile and a small wave. Seth didn’t even turn around. His shoulders were tense and I had a feeling he was about to snap. People called Dean and Roman the hotheads, but really, Seth was the one with the shortest fuse. I moved closer to his side.

“You know what?!!” Seth growled. “You tell Ambrose, he’s got his rematch!”

There was a collective gasp among the crowd, myself included.
“H-hang on…” Stephanie said, reaching for Seth. “Hang on a second… Let’s think about this first…”

“I know exactly what I’m doing,” Seth said. I grabbed his wrist. He tried to jerk it away, but I held on. “You tell Ambrose he doesn’t just have his rematch, he has his ladder match as well!”

“Seth!” I hissed. Hunter was getting that look in his eyes. Stephanie was as well. “Stop talking!”

“Seth…” Hunter said in a low menacing voice. Seth was too worked up to notice.

“No, no, you listen to me, all of you--”

“You should listen to Daddy,” Roman cut in.

“Roman!” I exclaimed, giving him my best death glare. He just grinned.

“Shut up!” Seth was ready to pop someone open. “At Money in the Bank, I’m going to prove to you, to Ambrose, to everybody in this ring, I don’t need anybody’s help!”

“Seth!” I dug my fingernails into his arm. He winced. “Stop talking now! You made your point!”

“Really?” Roman goaded him. “No one’s help at all?” He glanced over at the others in the ring.

Seth fumed. “I don’t need J & J Security, I sure as hell don’t need some seven foot tall piece of crap.” Kane raised an eyebrow at that. I dug my nails in deeper, but he didn’t even notice at that point. “And I don’t need the Authority.” I lost my hold on him as Hunter grabbed onto Seth, spinning him around to face him. Seth shoved him away. “No! NO! At Money In The Bank, I will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt who the undisputed champion really is!” He threw the microphone down. “Let’s go, dollface!”

I didn’t question him, nor did I look at anyone else in the ring. I followed Seth backstage, only slightly worried about what would happen to Roman. I knew he could take care of himself, and at the end of the day, he would take whatever the Authority threw at him.

**********

Seth was pacing, muttering to himself and me. We were in the Authority’s executive lounge, waiting for the rest of them, I suppose. I wasn’t sure what to do. He seemed to have forgotten that he wasn’t talking to me. “I can’t believe Roman. He knows I’m good. He knows I’m great! How dare he…” He turned towards me. “And you! What the hell was that?!”

“I did what I do??”

He marched up to me, shoving his finger in my face. “Telling me to stop talking! You’re supposed to be on my side!”

I pushed him away. “I am on your side, Seth! Don’t you realize what you were saying?!”

“The truth! I don’t need anyone to help me!”

“I know…” I said softly. “I know you don’t need anyone’s help. But you can’t just say that, especially not to Hunter and Stephanie. You know how vindictive they can get.” I held my hands out to him. “I was just trying to protect you, I swear.”

He glared at me, not sure if he should believe me or not. A knock at the door startled us both.
“Boss?” Jamie’s voice came through the door. “Thought you might be interested in--”

Seth threw the door open. “Get in.” He turned to me. “Get out.”

“But--”

“Trust me, dollface. You don’t want to be here for this.” He grabbed my arm and pushed me out the door, slamming it behind me.

**********

“Baby girl, can I borrow your shoulder?”

“Sure.” Roman sat down beside me, leaning heavily on me as he put his arm around my shoulder. I had heard about what the Authority had done to punish Roman. He had to win his match tonight in order to keep his spot at Money In The Bank. “So… Two matches… practically in a row… and a third coming up.” All of his matches. “I’m not entirely sure you don’t deserve it,” I said, but I leaned my head on his, humming softly.

“Why’s that? ’Cause I taunted Seth? Got him to say stupid shit in front of the bosses?” he asked, laughter in his voice.

“Pretty much. Making my job harder.” I sighed. “How has it been anyway? Your matches?”

“Barrett was tough. Mark Henry was tougher…” Roman coughed, grabbing his ribs as he did so. “And now, a third… against Bray Wyatt.” The “new face of fear”. He’s crazier than Dean, and really creeps me out. I shuddered.

“Dean had better appreciate what you’re doing for him,” I growled.

Roman chuckled. “He does. Sent me a text saying he’ll buy the first three rounds tonight.” I rolled my eyes, but stayed tucked into Roman’s embrace. He fell into a light sleep. I heard someone knock over some equipment nearby, but I didn’t move, afraid of waking him.

He slept until it was time for his next match.

“Want me to walk out with you?” I asked.

“Nah. I’m good. Kiss for good luck?” I kissed his cheek. “Keep your chin up, baby girl. I’m going to win, and then Dean is treating us both to pizza and beer.”

I managed to give him a smile. “I can’t wait.”

**********

My arm was grabbed and I was dragged along to the top of the ramp by Seth. Kane and the Jays were with him. I had been watching the match from backstage and wasn’t feeling up to being near the crowd, but Seth refused to let go of me.

Roman was momentarily distracted by our appearance, but thankfully kicked out of the pin Bray had gotten on him. Seth and the Jays were applauding Bray. I wanted to cheer for Roman, but Seth glared at me every single time I started to.

“He doesn’t need your cheers, dollface. He’s got this, right?” Seth sneered. I grit my teeth, refusing to rise to the bait. “Well, he’s going to need them cheers soon enough.” He pulled off his t-shirt, the one that matched mine. “Let’s go!”
I panicked as Seth, Kane and the Jays ran down to the ring. They were providing just enough
distraction to help Bray, but not enough to get thrown out of the arena. The Jays and Kane jumped
up on the apron. Roman took out the Jays, but Kane was the major distraction, allowing Bray to
come up from behind and put Roman in his finishing move, called Sister Abigail, supposedly a gift
from his dead sister… So creepy.

Roman fought out of it and sent Bray flying into Kane, knocking him off the apron. Roman
speared Bray when he turned around and got the three count. Seth quickly started barking orders,
and he and the other three surrounded the ring, with Roman in the center of it all.

“Seth! Please! Roman’s been through enough tonight!” I pleaded, grabbing Seth’s arm.

“It’s enough when I say it’s enough!” Seth roared at me. “He needs to pay! Now get back before I
get really angry!”

“Seth!”

Dean’s music hit the speakers and Seth became a sugar-high little kid with excitement. Dean was
the one Seth wanted, and hopefully Dean could repay Roman with more than just pizza and beer.

Seth ran towards the ramp, expecting Dean to appear there, but he was climbing on top of the
announcer’s table. “C’mon, Bieber! Come and get me!” he shouted.

Seth ran around the ring and attempted to spear Dean’s legs, but he only managed to send himself
over the table while Dean dodged it neatly and ducked into the ring to help Roman. The two of
them took out Joey and Kane, then Roman speared Jamie. Seth rolled back into the ring, just in
time for Dean to toss him the belt as a distraction, and apply Dirty Deeds to him again. Stephanie
and Hunter came out as Dean reclaimed the belt. I ran to Dean, getting to him just as he jumped
over the barrier that separated the crowd from the ring area.

“Dean! Please! Give the belt back,” I begged, reaching my hand out. I managed to catch it, but my
hold on it was not good. “You’ll get it if you win at--”

“No can do, kiddo,” he said, lightly pushing me away. “And no offense, but I’m going to have to
keep my distance from you. I love ya, but you’ll just try to talk me out of keeping this.” He held up
the belt as he backed away.

“Dean!”

He blew me a kiss, and continued to retreat into the crowd.

**********

“Oh my god, what happened?!” I shrieked. Tyson was being carried out on a stretcher and Cesaro
was holding Natalya up.

“Finishing move that went really bad,” Cesaro said. “Won't know how bad until he gets
examined.”

Natalya sobbed and launched herself at me. “Why? Why did this happen to him?!” she demanded
to no one in particular. I couldn't think of an answer and held her while she cried.

**********

“Seth?” I said in a small voice. We were backstage again. I knew this wasn’t the best time, but I
had to know, especially after everything that had happened tonight. He turned to me, his face unreadable again. He didn't say anything, just stared. “Um...what Dean said...about...about you using me to get to him and Roman...is it... is it true?”

“What if it was?” he asked coldly.

I flinched. “I... I didn't... I mean...I thought...” I thought I meant more to you than that...these past two months, I thought I could help you... and you fought for me to stay with you...but you were really only using me to get to them...I'm not your sister and what I thought to be true was really just another lie? But I couldn't get the words out and I dropped my gaze to the floor again. I felt betrayed and so stupid all over again. “I'll get going then...” I turned and walked away. He didn't stop me.

I took one last look behind me, hoping for...I'm not sure what, but Seth was talking with Kane and didn't even notice me.

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Smackdown - June 4, 2015

It was strange to be at home and watching Smackdown on my own tv. Strange, but also a bit of a relief. I watched as Seth came out to address the crowd. I had been depressed for the past week, and it hit me the day after Raw. It had been a year. A whole year since Seth had destroyed the Shield. I was dressed in my comfiest (and rattiest) pajamas, eating comfort food and drinking chocolate milk. Seth even referenced the anniversary as he ranted about how Roman and Dean had dragged him down. Was I just another weight on Seth? I was almost relieved when Dean appeared on the large screen over the ramp, telling Seth he had grown soft in the Authority, and that he had grown strong because of the environment the Authority had created for him and Roman. I couldn't disagree with that part, but I did disagree with Seth being soft. He had become...entitled. He was still a great wrestler, but he had lost something in his time with the Authority. He used their support as a crutch, and when he didn't have it, he was like a puppy without a master. I shook my head and continued to watch. “You know what I’ve been doing for the past year? Surviving. Not just surviving, protecting. Without you, we grew stronger. Without you, we were soooo much better off.”

Dean was mostly taking cheap shots at Seth, but Seth was looking like he was ready to murder Dean. Since this was all pre-recorded, unlike Raw, I grabbed my phone.

Me: Hey. Don't pay attention to Dean. He's only half right, about the environment he and Ro have been in. You're not soft. You're a great wrestler and you will always be--

I stopped. Was that too much? Was it weird that I was texting him? I almost never did when we were on the road, unless it was business related. I grit my teeth and tried again.

Me: Hey. Don't pay attention to Dean. You're not soft.

I didn't expect him to text me back right away. Or at all, really, so I was surprised when my phone chimed before I had set it down.

SR: course I'm not. hard as a rock, dollface.

Me: ...
Why do I even worry about you?
This time there was a considerable amount of time before he responded. I kept seeing the little typing symbol pop up. I guess he kept changing his mind about what he wanted to say.

SR: i dunno

I rolled my eyes and set my phone aside.

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The tag team matches were not something I normally paid attention to anymore. It was nothing against the teams, except maybe New Day, it was just my own issues coming into play.

It was interesting to hear Kevin Owens talk. I was not a fan, but I had to admit he was a compelling speaker, even if his attitude stunk. I smiled as Zack Ryder came out to take on Kevin’s “NXT Open Challenge”, a clear jab at Cena’s US Champion Open Challenge. Zack was a sweet guy, and I hoped he would shut Kevin’s mouth, but Kevin’s Pop-up Powerbomb was nothing to laugh at. Add to that, he was also a sore winner, attacking Zack twice more after the match was over.

I grabbed my phone again.

Me: Zackattack! Hope you’re doing ok. Saw your match. You did well. Kevin’s a jerk.

He didn’t respond until well after the commercial break.

Z-WOO: Thanks. :) You doing ok?

Me: Yeah, I’m great. Just enjoying some time off.

Z-WOO: Seth said you were sick!

That was weird. Why would he say that?

Me: He’s probably just confused. Or trying to be funny? Idk. I’m on a mini-vacation, as healthy as can be. Well, if you don’t count the junk food.

Z-WOO: Hahahaha. Good to know.

Ah, I have to go. I’ll see you when you get back.

Me: K. Stay safe.

I debated on texting Seth again to ask about why he told Zack I was sick. In the end, I decided I would just let it go.

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Miz TV, or the reason I would never like Miz. He was not a journalist, he was a sensationalist, and I hated that he was milking the Lana/Rusev breakup for “ratings”. Accusing Lana of breaking up with Rusev because he was “broken”, when his foot injury had come after the breakup, and he was the one that broke up with her. She had merely refused to take Rusev back. I was actually very proud of her for not taking his crap. It’s one thing if she accepted his views, but completely different if she didn’t.

Introducing Rusev as his “surprise guest”, though I wondered if anyone was really surprised, was a cheap shot in my opinion. Rusev played the contrite ex-boyfriend, but no one was buying the act, especially Lana. I laughed when she said, “I’ll tell yoo vere you can put yoor crutches.”
Me: You go, girl.

Lana-banana: I go...where?

Me: Hahaha, I just meant I’m proud of you.

Lana-banana: :) thank you

As expected, Rusev started hurling insults at her, merely proving her point. Mercifully, Dolph came out and escorted Lana away from the angry Bulgarian. It was nice, seeing someone treat Lana with respect. I may have accused Dolph of having a wandering eye, but I couldn’t accuse him of not treating a woman right when he was with her. I wished them both the best of luck.

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Roman’s match with his Money In The Bank competitor, Sheamus, was next. I texted Roman to tell him I was about to watch it. No reply.

Sheamus went after the injured areas on Roman’s body, which was to be expected, but it was still awful to watch. Roman had finally gotten the upperhand, when Kane and the Jays came out, providing a distraction for Sheamus to capitalize on, but Roman managed to stay afloat, kicking out of the pins Sheamus put him in. He had regained the momentum and was about to beat Sheamus, but Kane rolled into the ring and gave Roman a big boot to the face. The ref called the match, win by disqualification to Roman, but Kane wasn’t done.

He attempted a chokeslam to Roman, who fought out of it. Sheamus kicked Roman in the face, but only earned a chokeslam from Kane, right before he announced that he would be the last entrant in the Money In The Bank ladder match. I grabbed my phone again.

Me: Well...that was unexpected.

RoRo: Yeah. Sorry I didn’t respond sooner. Didn’t want to spoil it for you. It sucks the big one. Kane is going to be gunning for me, I just know it.

Me: You can handle him. :) BELIEVE THAT.

RoRo: HAHAHAHAHAHA Very true.
I didn't talk more than I needed to once I returned to the road. It helped that I had those days off, but it felt strange to not have much to say. Roman and Renee both commented on it, but Dean told them via phone conversations to leave me alone. He was happier than I had seen him in a while. Well, not seen, since he was still avoiding me like the plague, but it was clear in his tone.

Seth and I... Well, we only spoke about work. I did what I was asked, when I was asked, and it was only killing me slightly to keep my emotions bottled up, to bite my tongue when I would normally say something. It was a bit easier, to be honest, keeping to this new, impersonal dynamic. Just so long as I didn't stay inside my head that much. The Jays certainly seemed to enjoy my taciturn approach, as did Stephanie. Kane was the one who questioned my tactics.

“So you're just going to lie back and let him be a brat?” he asked me in the catering room. I was refilling my coffee mug and he was enjoying a hot tea. We had talked about what he had done to Roman last Thursday and had agreed to disagree. A lot of conversations ended like that.

“I misunderstood the amount of influence I had with Rollins,” I told him, shaking a sugar packet before I opened it. “Turns out, it was zero.”

Kane sipped his tea. “I find that hard to believe. He pushed hard for Stephanie to make you the manager to the champion, though it was a coincidence that he got the belt the same night you got your promotion. He didn't know Stephanie had relented when he ran out there. Hell, she didn't know he was going to do that. Neither did Hunter. He was livid afterwards.”

“They didn’t know?” I was definitely surprised by that. All this time I had thought it was some diabolical plan of Stephanie’s. I suppose it still was, just not on the time table she and Hunter had planned.

“Yeah, he just...ran out there on his own. He had been chomping at the bit to use his contract since he got it, but Hunter had been telling him to wait for the right moment. I guess Seth had had enough waiting. I saw him talking to Shawn right before and then next thing I know... Anyway, it's done.” He took another sip, looking content. “So what happened to cause this change?”

I poured a bit of creamer into my coffee and sat next to Kane at the table. I debated whether it was a good idea or not to tell him, but we were allies, and it certainly wasn't something I could tell Dean or Roman. I grit my teeth and hoped this wasn't a terrible idea. “Dean questioned Rollins about keeping me around and his reasoning for it. He suggested that it was only to get to him and Roman, and Rollins never disagreed with him.”

“But he didn't admit that was why?” Kane asked.

I shook my head. “I asked him point blank, and he could have told me it wasn't true, but he didn't. Honestly, maybe it's better this way. I can keep him at a distance, and Stephanie and Hunter are happy. I mean, they aren't exactly my biggest fans, so they're thrilled that I'm not 'whispering' in his ear anymore. Which, by the way, I do not do. I’m just looking out for Rollins’ best interests.”

“Not your biggest fans, understatement of the year,” he said with a chuckle. “Well, for what it's worth, I think it's better that you fight him on things, call him out. I may be called his ‘lapdog’, but you're the only one that can call him to heel, make him think about his actions.”
Both of our attentions were drawn to a commotion in the hallway. Roman and Seth were snarling at each other, Roman being held back by Jimmy and Jey Uso, and Seth being held back by the Jays. I was out of my seat in a flash, anger surging through my veins. *I have had enough!* There was a kendo stick leaning against the wall. I grabbed it and brought it down hard on a steel chair near them, getting everyone's attention. The Uso twins muttered *Oh, shit…* in unison.

“Hey! What the hell is going on here?!” I angrily asked.

“This punk is just *asking* for a beat down,” Roman growled.

“You and your little rat pack should just *mind your own damn business,*” Seth barked back.

I stepped in between them, holding my hands up at each man. “You *will* retreat to opposite sides of the arena for the time being. If I so much as hear you muttering each other's names, I will not be lenient. I will not be gentle. And I *will* beat both your asses myself. Do I make myself clear?!”

Both men were taken by surprise and faltered in their stances. I was surprised as well, but I couldn't stop to think about it.

“Did I stutter?!" I yelled. “*Go!*”

They all scrambled away. My mind was racing a bit and I tried to calm myself. Kane came up behind me, handing me my travel mug. “Nice job,” he said, smiling.

“I have no idea where that came from,” I admitted to him, looking down at the kendo stick still in my hand.

Kane laughed. “You're holding back on Seth. It's not that much of a surprise that it came out somewhere else.”

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Kevin Owens winked at me as he sauntered past after beating Neville in his NXT Championship Open Challenge. I rolled my eyes and kept walking, following Seth who was looking at his phone obsessively. I was still upset over what Kevin had done during their last match to Sami, who was out on medical leave for several months. It brought back way too many memories.

We walked into Stephanie and Hunter’s office. “Can you believe this?” Seth asked them, interrupting their conversation. “Have you seen this??”

I finally had a chance to look over Seth’s shoulder to see what he was obsessing over. It was WWE’s Instagram account, and there were several photos of Dean with the title belt. One of which was of him playing a pink saxophone. It was actually a pretty good photo of him, and I made a mental note to look it up later and like it. Seth and Hunter were disgusted by it.

“He’s rubbing this in our faces, this theft! What are we going to do about it?” he asked Hunter and Stephanie.

*Oh boy…* I saw the change in their faces. *This is where you're going to wish you had listened to me last week,* I thought.

“We?” Hunter asked. “You must mean you and your ‘dollface’.”

“What?” Seth asked, not even looking at me.
“For the record, I do not like that nickname,” I said. Hunter just shrugged, smirking at me.

“Rubbing it in our faces?” Stephanie asked, ignoring me completely. “I think you made it very clear to us and the WWE Universe that you neither need nor want our help.” Seth bit his lip in frustration, finally looking over at me. I told you, I thought, but didn’t say it out loud. I knew that he knew exactly what I was thinking. Stephanie continued. “If you want something done about Dean Ambrose, you’re going to have to do it on your own.”

Seth grimaced and spoke carefully. We had been over what he should say to these two, and he had fought me on parts of it, but we had come up with a decent compromise. “I meant every word I said,” Seth started, and Hunter’s face hardened a bit, “about J & J Security and especially about Kane. I don’t need his help, never did. But you guys, I have always had the utmost respect for you, especially you, Hunter, sir.”

“But you don’t need our help.” Hunter was attempting to stare holes into Seth’s skull.

“I don’t?” Seth asked cautiously. I wondered if he was unsure of where the conversation was headed, like I was, or if he was unsure of not actually needing their help now that it was being withdrawn. It felt like a trap.

“No,” Stephanie said. “It’s like you said. You don’t need us to take care of Dean. At Money In The Bank, you will defend your championship all on your own.”

“But...you guys are going to be there…right?” Seth looked worried. I bit my tongue, biting back the reassuring words that I wanted to say. Stephanie said them for me, but from her, they didn’t sound reassuring at all.

“Yes, of course, but only as observers. You can beat Dean,” she said, staring straight at Seth. It sounded like empty words from her. “All. On. Your. Own.” Seth fidgeted under their combined stare. Without thinking, I placed my hand on his back. You can do it, Seth. I know you can.

“And, tonight, we thought we’d let you pick your opponent. Have a little tune-up match before Sunday. Show us, Seth, what you can do on your own.”

“Well, I… thank you? No, I mean, thank you. For believing in me, for giving me the confidence… I won’t let you down.” He smiled at both of them, then led me out of the office. Once we were away from them, he said, “That went well.”

“Did it?” Something felt off, but I couldn’t place my finger on it. “So, any ideas on who are you going to pick to fight tonight?”

“A few,” he said, grinning while looking behind me. “Oh, yeah. A few.” I could hear several superstars behind me, many of which would be excellent choices for Seth. I only hoped he would choose a decent match over a sure win.

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I was watching Randy’s match with Sheamus, silently cheering him on as Seth was still obsessing over the pictures of Dean on Instagram, when the Jays came in. I turned the volume down on the tv, turning to watch what was sure to be entertaining.

Jamie was making a horrible attempt to get Seth to apologize for saying he didn’t need them, stating Joey was quite sensitive and was taking the set down very personally, but had forgiven Seth. I scoffed at that, but Jamie only glared at me briefly before continuing. Seth looked a bit baffled by the passionate, if strange, speech.
“Wait...you forgive me??” Seth said in bewilderment. “That’s rich. Are you kidding me?? I meant every single thing I said about you two, last week, tonight, hell, I’ll bad mouth you right here to your faces. You would be nothing without me. I chose you to be my security team because I felt sorry for you. Do you understand that?” My eyebrows shot up. This was unexpected. Seth shook his head, looking down on them, which wasn’t hard since they were closer to my height than his. “I made you two what you are, and all I wanted in return was a bit of competence. Maybe, just maybe, if you did your damn jobs, then Dean Ambrose wouldn’t be running around this stinkhole of a city with my title belt. Y/N is his little sister and even she tried to get it back for me.”

“Hey, leave me out of this,” I said, shaking my head. “And cut them some slack. You of all people should know how difficult Dean can be when he sets his mind to something.”

Seth waved off my words, turning back to the Jays. “What have you two done? I never needed either of you losers.”

“Rollins…” I started, but Jamie put his hand up, stopping me from saying anything else.

“Well, if that’s how you really feel, then I just have one thing to say. Screw you! If it wasn’t for us, you never would have become champion. You think we’re losers? Take a good long look in the mirror, because come Money In The Bank, you’re going to wish we were still in your corner.”

“Hey!” I said, jumping up to Seth’s side. “He’s perfectly capable of defending his championship on his own!”

Joey shook his head. Jamie went right on talking. “We’re Shield 2.0! Joey’s a better Roman Reigns, and I’m a much more handsome Dean Ambrose.”

“Delusional guy say what now?” I demanded. Jamie was not a bad looking man, but to compare himself to Dean. I wanted to kick him.

Jamie pointed at me. “We have the sweet talker manager, and you, the Architect. We’re unstoppable. I mean... tarnations! You’re turning on us just as you did the first Shield!” Joey pulled Jamie aside to whisper something. “Yeah, yeah, I know. He’s a skunk haired, catsuit wearing sunovagun. And you wouldn’t last a minute if the Authority wasn’t backing you.”

“Oh, really? Really?? That’s what you really think of me?! Well, guess what? The Authority granted me the ability to choose my opponent tonight. And I choose... you,” he said, stepping right up to Jamie. “And you, Joey. This is going to be a two on one handicap match.”

“Seth,” I said, grabbing his wrist. “Are you sure about this? I mean, as thrilled as I am at the challenge you’re giving yourself, these guys have been with you for a while now...”

“Oh, I am sure about it, dollface. I will prove exactly how good I am by beating both of you,” he said to them.

“Seth, we all know how good you are--”

Jamie snarled at me, “You would say that, darlin’, considering you’re his little slu--”

“Hey! Finish that sentence and you will be spitting teeth out for the next week, Noble!” I growled.

“It’s not like she’s lying,” Seth said with a cackle and slapped Jamie, but Jamie slapped Seth right back. The two attempted to brawl right then and there, but Joey got in between them as I jumped out of the way.
“Hey!” Joey said, surprising all of us, especially Seth. “You think we’re jokes? Morons? We’ve had your back from day one, and tonight, we’re going to kick your ass.”

“Whoa…” I couldn’t help myself from uttering. Joey looked at me and winked. I also couldn’t help myself from blushing at that. This was unlike the Joey Mercury I had come to know, and it was a bit attractive. He glanced back at Seth, scowling at him, then turned and pushed Jamie out of the room.

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I really wished I could understand what Rusev was saying. He had been harassing Lana while Dolph was in a match with Kane, and Lana fell off the ramp trying to get away from him. Dolph, distracted by Lana’s distress, lost to Kane. I had run to Lana’s side, along with a few of the medics. “Lana, whatever he’s saying, just ignore him,” I told her. She nodded, grimacing as the medical trainer removed her shoe. Dolph joined us, trying to help her but not knowing how. “Put your arm over my shoulders, and the other over Dolph’s. We’ll get you backstage.”

Once Lana was in good hands, I walked back towards the gorilla position. I passed by Jamie and Joey, who were lacing up boots. “He brought this on himself,” Jamie said.

“Guys…” They both looked up at me. “Look, I know we’ve had our differences, but… Are you… Are you really ok with all of this? I mean, like Joey said, you’ve been with Seth since the beginning…or as close to it as possible…”

“Worried about us or your sugar daddy, darlin’?” Jamie sneered, but Joey put his hand on his arm. “Yeah, we’re sure about this,” he said. “You going to be standing with Seth tonight?”

I shrugged my shoulders. “I haven’t decided if I’ll be ringside or not, but I always stand with Rollins. You know that.”

“Well, I was upset, of course, Dean and Roman are my brothers. But when it comes down to it, I will always do what I think is best for my client.”

Joey stood up and walked towards me slowly until he was right in front of me. Leaning in close, he said softly in my ear, “Even when it completely ruins his plans by bailing your brother out?” I stiffened. “Yeah, I know about that. Jamie doesn’t. Won’t tell anyone either, but you should be more careful. I get what you’re doing. I think it’s insane, and will never work, but I get it. I also know what Jamie told you that night at the bar. I apologize for my associate. He saw you as a threat, and was trying to eliminate you from the equation, make you run away on your own. Seth never told us any of that stuff, and I have no idea where Jamie got the idea to do that.”

“Thank you, Joey.” I felt a little bad that he was going to be fighting Seth now, and for all the mean things I had thought about him.

“We never thought you were a threat, sweetheart,” he said, winking at me again. He turned to walk back to Jamie, then asked, “Do you really think he could have gotten that championship without the Authority?”

“I do. Might have taken a bit longer, but I have no doubt about it.”

Joey nodded, and walked back to finish getting ready for their match.

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Kane was leaving the locker room as I got back, grinning while Seth was seething. “What happened?” I asked.

“That seven-foot bastard is such a…such a...” He growled a little.


“He’s going to be in J & J’s corner. And he’s threatening to cash in the Money In The Bank contract as soon as the match between me and Ambrose is over, no matter who the winner is. ‘Your lose-lose is my win-win,’ he said. Bastard.”

What?

“I feel like I’m still missing something, but… Look, the Jays are good. You’re better. Kane is good. You’re better.”

“And Dean?” He raised an eyebrow at me.

I sighed heavily. “He’s definitely going to make you work for it, but… and if you repeat this, I will deny I ever said it… but, I think you might be better than him as well. He runs on pure instinct, his plans are half-cocked, and luck is on his side a lot of the time. You...you take the time to think things through, when your anger doesn’t get the best of you, so...yeah, I think you can outthink him and therefore, beat him.”

Seth stared at me a bit before dropping his gaze to the ground. “Thanks,” he mumbled. “C’mon. You’re going to be at ringside. In my corner. Got it?”

I smiled a little, but he didn’t see it. “Of course, Rollins. But if you think I’m running interference...”

“Yeah, yeah, I know. You aren’t.”

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We stopped at Stephanie and Hunter’s office before going to the ring. Roman had just finished his match with Kofi Kingston of the New Day, which he won, and was waiting at ringside for Dean, who brought popcorn and soda.

“Can you believe this?” Seth asked, pointing at the monitor Stephanie and Hunter had been watching. “The nerve of this guy.”

“Yeah,” Hunter said, nonchalantly. “Dean Ambrose. He’s something.” Seth looked at the monitor expectantly. I would have laughed if I wasn’t in their presence. “What? Did you need something? Did you want to ask for something?”

Seth was gritting his teeth, warring with himself over asking for their help or dealing with things on his own. He turned and marched out of the office without responding, frustrated. I gave Stephanie and Hunter a quick nod and followed him out, straight to the ring. Dean was sitting in the front row behind the barricades, taunting Seth about the belt.

“Dollface…” he said, still tense from talking to Hunter and Stephanie.

“Yeah, I’ll try, Rollins.” He didn’t need to ask me. “Don’t treat those guys lightly. They’re not jokes, you know. At least, not in ring.” I went over to Dean, “You know what I’m going to ask.”
“You know what my answer will be,” he said, offering me popcorn. I declined. The match had started behind me. “More for me.”

“Dean.” I didn’t like to use my nickname for him in front of the fans. “Seriously. I know you like to annoy him, and as much as I would love for you to have that championship belt—”

“Let him keep it then!” a random fan nearby said.

“Hey, watch the match, not me,” I said to him. I turned back to Dean, who was watching the match intently. “Hey! I’m talking to you! Watch me, not the match!”

“But the match is so interesting—”

“Dean!”

He laughed. “Kiddo, lighten up! Seth is going to lose tonight, and he’s going to lose on Sunday. You’ll be free of him, and he won’t be able to use you against us anymore.” I bit my lip. That’s right, I am just a tool for Seth. I had always known it, but to hear Dean say it so joyfully… “Oh, look, Noble’s going in.”

I turned to see Jamie fired up, bouncing all over the ring and pinning Seth after performing a swinging neckbreaker. He’s going to run out of energy if he keeps that up. Seth managed to handle the unexpected exuberance of Jamie, though Joey interfered a bit, allowing Jamie to pin Seth again. Seth got him into position for a Pedigree, but while I had my eye on the ring, Dean jumped over the barricade.

“Dee! What are you doing??” I hissed, trying to grab the title belt.

“Returning the belt to Seth, of course,” he said, walking up to the ring. I was so surprised, I couldn’t react at first. Dean threw the belt into the ring. “Go on, Seth, go on and take it,” he taunted.

I was next to Dean in that moment. “Rollins! No! No! Finish the match first!” I tried to grab the belt, but Dean was holding me back.

Seth looked from me, to Dean, to the belt...and let go of Jamie. He kept his eyes on Dean as he walked towards the belt. “Seth! NO!” I screamed. Dean had a solid grip on me.

Seth picked up the belt, “You better--” Joey came up behind him, knocking Seth over and pinning him for a three count. He quickly got out of the ring, and celebrated with Kane and Jamie. Dean shoved me over to the announcer’s table and jumped into the ring before I could stop him, performing a Dirty Deeds on Seth, and taking back the belt.

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Smackdown - June 11, 2015

Dean kicked off Smackdown, addressing the WWE universe, talking about his exploits in New Orleans, and showing the footage from Seth’s match on Monday night Raw. Seth dragged me out of there when he realized what Dean was doing. “I’ll distract him, you grab the belt,” he hissed at me.

“Fine, fine.”

“Oh, look, it’s my favorite boy band without a band, Justin Beiber,” Dean said. “And my favorite
little sister. Well, she’s my only little sister, but still.” The crowd laughed at that.

“Ambrose, I’m going to give you one last chance to give me back my title. You think you’re better, or different, than any other challenger that has come before you, but you’re not. You’re just like every other scumbag person in this arena.”

“Hey!” I seriously wanted to hit him. He glanced at me, a look of uncertainty in his eyes, but quickly turned back to Dean. “Ugh…”

“I will be leaving Money In The Bank with my title, because you are simply not in my league. Now give the belt back to me, before I come into that ring, and beat you bloody,” Seth snarled, jumping up onto the apron of the ring. Dean’s focus was on Seth, so I stealthily walked around, circling behind him. All I needed to do was grab the belt and be out of there fast as lightning. Easy peasy.

“Hey, relax, man. It’s just a gag,” Dean said, laughing a little. “I didn’t think you’d take it so seriously, get your panties all up in a twist. Here, if you want it back, just…just take it.” I narrowed my eyes at Dean’s back. He placed the belt in the center of the ring and rolled out. “Go on. It’s right there.”

I slid into the ring, meeting Seth in front of the belt. Both of us were confused by Dean’s actions. Seth recovered first. “It’s about damn time,” he said, picking up the belt.

“Wait a minute…” I said, grabbing the belt from Seth and turning to Dean. “What the hell! This isn’t the championship belt!!” I held it up, pointing at the medallions on the sides. Seth grabbed it back and stared at it.

“This is a replica!” he yelled.

Dean laughed. “Ok, ok, you got me. I was going to tell you, I swear. I picked that one up at the gift shop. So...long story short, I don’t know where the championship belt is.”

Seth threw the replica belt down in frustration. “Are you kidding me?!”

“Rollins, calm down… Dean, are you seriously not kidding? How do you lose a belt like that? It’s huge.”

“Well, maybe to you, kiddo, since you’re so tiny…”

“Hey!”

“It’s cute. I love that you’re pocket size.” Dean blew kisses at me.

“It’s only because you all are so freakishly tall!! I am not short!” I swear I’m not, but anyone looks short standing next to giants.

“Of course you’re not. Anyway, look, Monday was a crazy day. And night. And honestly, parts of it are a bit hazy. After I left the arena, I went back into town, made some new friends, and...well, it’s somewhere in the last town. Or between here and the last town. But don’t you worry! I’m going to retrace my steps, and I will find it, I will bring it to Money In The Bank, and I will walk out with it as well. Gotta go!”

“Hey!” Seth yelled, “I’m not done with you! Get back here!”

Both of our attentions were claimed by the exploding fire theme that announced Kane. Seth clenched his fists and turned to meet the Director of Operations. I debated on chasing after Dean,
but considering he didn’t have the belt at all, there was little I could do even if I did manage to catch up to him. Kane announced that Seth would have a match with Dolph Ziggler, and that he would be all alone for this match, as well as the match at Money In The Bank. “Well, you’ll have your manager, but that’s the same as being alone in the ring, since she’s such a stickler for letting her little baby bird fly on his own.”

“What did I do to earn all these potshots tonight?” I muttered, folding my arms over my chest.

“Fuck if I know,” Seth muttered back. “Why the hell did he call me your baby bird…”

I rolled my eyes. Of course that was what he focused on.

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“Y/N, I hope you don’t mind, but Dolf vill vin against Rollins.” Lana beamed at me. “I am his good luck charm.”

“I’m sure you are, Lana, but don’t count Rollins out just yet.”

Lana giggled and waved at someone behind me. I turned to see Dolph walking by, grinning like a schoolboy in love at her. “He vill vin,” she repeated, winking at me. “Even if he loses match.”

I laughed. “I’m sure he will.”

**********

Kane ordered me to stay backstage at the last minute. “I know you won’t interfere, but Stephanie and Hunter are serious about Seth being on his own tonight. And...for Money In The Bank. I’m sorry.”

“No, I get it. I don’t like it, but I get it. He'll win regardless if I'm out there or not.” I offered Kane one of the cookies I had picked up from catering.

“You have a lot of faith in his ability,” he remarked, taking the offering.

“Because I’ve seen it, up close and personal. I used to watch him, Roman, and Dean for hours on end, practicing their moves, getting in sync with each other. I know all three of them can do anything if they put their minds to it.”

“And if Dean’s put his mind to winning the championship?” He took a big bite of the cookie, crumbs spilling over his suit. I brushed them off for him.

“I love my brother, and I'm sure he'll win it someday. But I don't think it will be at Payback.”

“Hmmm... well, how do you think I'll do in the Money In The Bank match? Against your other brother?”

I grinned. “I think you need to be prepared for some rough competition if you intend on winning it.”

He laughed at that.

**********

“I did it,” Seth cackled as he walked backstage. I followed behind him, smiling a little, though he couldn’t see it. “I told them I didn't need help.”
“Wonderful job out there,” Stephanie said, doing a slow clap that could only be regarded as sarcastic. She was leaning on the doorframe to her office. “And even without the moral support of your little sister.”

“I told you,” Seth said, if a bit tersely, “I don't need anyone's help to retain the championship. Not even hers.”

Stephanie looked positively giddy over his statement. “Well, best of luck to you on Sunday,” she said sweetly before going back into her office and closing the door.

I followed Seth to his locker room. “Are you going to tell me you forgive me for saying I don't need you?” he asked, his back to me.

“Why would I do that? It's true.”

He turned around. “I… what?”

I shrugged. “It's true. You don't need me. You have the skills, the drive to succeed...maybe not the best temperament, so I guess that part you kind of need me for, but even that I think you'd be able to muddle through if you set your mind to it, so...no, I don't think you actually need me around.”

Seth blinked a few times in surprise. “Right...well, just so we're clear…”

**********

Roman caught me as I was walking with Seth to catering. “Baby girl, got a minute?”

“No, she doesn't,” Seth growled at him. I pushed him in the direction of the food.

“Go eat, maybe you'll be more agreeable. I'll be there in a few minutes.” Seth glared at me, then at Roman, but thankfully kept on walking. I turned to Roman. “What's up?”

“Ah, well, I was hoping to get a good luck kiss. Also wanted to check on you. Word around the lockers is that you've been having a hard time with that one.” He gestured in the direction Seth had gone in.

“Eh, no more than usual. People like to gossip.”

“They’re saying that you've been added to the list of people he doesn't need,” he said, raising his eyebrow at me.

“Yeah, but unlike the others in the Authority, I already knew that. So, if you're wondering if I'm bothered by it, I can assure you that I am not.”

Roman was taken aback. “Baby girl… that's...and you still want to help him?”

I smiled. “I do.” I stood on my tiptoes, but he still had to lean down a bit so I could kiss his cheek. “Good luck tonight.”

“Thanks. I think you might actually be crazier than Deano.”

“Oh, you're just now noticing?” I said with a laugh as I waved at him and walked away.

**********

Seth was on edge when I found him in catering. I wasn't that hungry, but if I didn't eat now, I would
be starving by the time I arrived at the hotel. Sitting next to Seth, I asked, “Do you want to watch
the tag match or--”

“I'm heading out as soon as I finish,” he said, some of the food in his mouth falling out as he
talked, but he didn't care. “You can stay.”

“Oh… But I was going to--”

“It's fine. Cesaro is driving with me. You're not needed.”

It was the way he said it, like it wasn't that I wasn't needed, it was that I wasn't wanted on this trip.
It hurt. “Oh, ok… I guess I can catch a ride on the bus then…”

He grunted an ambiguous reply and we ate in silence until he got up to leave, not even saying
goodbye.

**********

The end of Roman's tag match was bittersweet. He picked up the win for himself, Randy and
Neville, but it was because Big E and Xavier Woods attacked him and the match ended in a
disqualification. Kane was pissed.
I stood in between Seth and Paige as we all paid tribute to Dusty Rhodes, the American Dream, who had passed away just three days prior. No one except his family had known until Friday. I held Paige’s hand, the two of us silently crying over the loss of a great wrestler and one of the best men in the business as the bell was rung for him.

**********

I watched the monitor carefully as the Money In The Bank ladder match was underway. Seven men in the ring, all vying for the briefcase hanging high above them. Kofi Kingston, Sheamus, Neville, Kane, Dolph Ziggler, Randy Orton, and Roman. The first one to get up the ladder and claim it would be entitled to a guarranteed match for the WWE Heavyweight Championship. Didn't matter when or where, they could cash it in for the chance at the title belt.

Seth was...somewhere. I hadn't seen him since we walked backstage after Dusty’s tribute, and had barely spoken to him since he left Smackdown on Thursday.

Roman had asked for a good luck kiss, and asked if I would be giving one to Dean later. I had told him I wouldn't, but part of me wanted to, if only to spread a little positivity around. I felt forgotten and a little lost. Seth not needing me didn’t bother me in the slightest. Seth not wanting me around hurt worse than I had expected.

I watched the match with Renee, making small comments about it with her. Roman wasn't active for a large part of the match. Kane delivered a chokeslam to Roman that put him out of commission. Finally, he was able to take out everyone else, even Xavier and Big E, who had come out to help Kofi, but as he reached the top of the ladder to get the briefcase, Bray Wyatt appeared out of nowhere, knocking Roman off the ladder, and performing Sister Abigail on him. I clenched my fists in anger, digging my nails hard enough into my palm to draw blood. Renee put her hand on my shoulder, trying to get me to calm down. I could do nothing as Sheamus crawled into the ring. Everyone else had been laid out by Roman throwing Kofi into them. The Irish warrior climbed the ladder Roman had been pushed from. Neville attempted to stop him, but Sheamus pulled Neville off the ladder by his hair and claimed the briefcase that held the coveted contract.

I glared at the monitor. Seth won't let you win, Sheamus. Believe that.

**********

Roman sat with me, staying quiet for the most part. I held his hand, as the night went on. Renee had been by, giving him a hug.

“Wyatt has a lot to answer for…” Roman said suddenly.

“And he will. But not tonight, Ro.” I squeezed his hand. “Rest for now.” He grumbled, but I pinched his forearm and he settled down.

The Divas championship match between Paige and Nikki Bella was a joke. Well, only the ending was. The rest of it was actually pretty good. Just that ending… That damn Twin Magic move of the Bella Twins was annoying and I wasn't even involved in the Divas division!

The next match was Ryback versus Big Show, for the Intercontinental Championship. Another
disgrace. Miz was on commentary, whoever had thought that was a good idea was a moron, and had interfered in the match, attacking first Big Show, then Ryback. Big Show won, but Ryback retained the championship. It was a complete mess, and both men were clearly unhappy with the outcome.

John Cena’s rematch with Kevin Owens was next. It was interesting, brutal, but that’s just Kevin. I may not like him, but I couldn’t deny that he was a great wrestler. I will never forgive you for Sami, though.

“Who do you think will win?” Roman asked me.

“Hmm….I think John will win.”

“Why’s that?”

I tilted my head as I thought. I didn’t really have reason. “I think he has more to prove in this one.”

It took several more minutes, and some new moves by John, but he won.

“You called it,” Roman said.

“Mmhmmmm...oh... John, no, don’t--” John had extended a handshake to Kevin in a show of good sportsmanship, but Kevin had waited until John looked away for a moment before attacking. “I really dislike him.”

**********

Dean appeared on the screen, being interviewed by Renee, and he had the belt. The REAL belt.

“Ro, I have to go.”

“Baby girl, can’t you just let him have this?”

“Et tu, Roman?” I asked, glancing at him. He shrugged. “I can’t just ignore this, you know. Rollins is my client.”

Roman looked at me thoughtfully. “No, I guess you can’t.” He pushed a lock of hair behind my ear. “You are too good sometimes, you know that? It’s ok to bend the rules once in a while. The title will get to where it’s needed. Dean needs it to be above the ring in order to win it. So, don’t worry too much right now.”

“But--”

He wrapped his arm around me. Damned giant that he is, it only took one arm for him to hold me in place. I struggled against him, but it only made him laugh. “Baby girl, there’s no way you’re getting out of this. Just accept it.”

I grumbled, and gave an unhappy acknowledgement, settling in to watch the tag team championship match of New Day versus the Primetime Players.

**********

Roman finally let me go when it was time for Dean versus Seth. I walked with Seth through the arena, a few steps behind him, his head held high, his focus laser sharp. We walked by the Jays and Kane. None of them had any kind words for him. His concentration was wavering after the snickers of the Jays and the gleeful joy Kane took in telling Seth he had no chance of winning
tonight. I glared at him, but Kane merely smiled back.

Stephanie and Hunter were not far away. “Not to put pressure on you, but this company is riding on your shoulders. If the unthinkable should happen,” Stephanie said, her voice hardening as she continued, “Then we have no one to blame, but you.”

Bitch.

She walked off. Hunter glanced at me, but paid me no mind otherwise. “Don’t worry about Steph,” he told Seth. “Clear your mind. Focus. Go out there, and show them. Show them why I picked you. Show them that you are the man.”

Seth was huffing, pumped up by Hunter’s words. I hated that Hunter had such a great influence over him, but I couldn’t deny that it was what Seth needed after the rest of the members of the Authority.

“Remember, you stay backstage,” Hunter whispered to me before he left us. I continued to follow Seth to the gorilla position.

Dean went out first, the title already taken from him and placed above the ring. Seth was staring at his back. “Damned lunatic…” Seth muttered.

“You’re going to win,” I said quietly.

He looked over at me. “Did you give Dean any good luck? Might throw a kink into the chain if you did.” He spat out the words, accusing me of something I hadn’t done.

I shook my head. “They don’t actually do anything, you know. I have no magic, therefore no good luck to give, just… faith in their abilities. I give them ‘good luck kisses’ as a sign of my faith in them.” I looked up at him. “You don’t need luck. You don’t need the Jays, or Kane, or the Authority, and least of all, you don’t need me. I believe in you, Seth Rollins. You’re going to win.”

He raised an eyebrow at me. “Dollface--”

His music began, and he turned to walk out. No one was around us. I was quick, pulling him down by his arm and kissing his cheek. “It doesn’t matter if I give you a good luck kiss or not, because you got this, Rollins.” I turned and walked away, my face hot with embarrassment, not looking behind me. I prayed that I hadn’t made a mistake in doing that.

**********

I made a mistake. I was back with Roman and Renee, watching with her and a few other women, as Dean took the upper hand early in the match. Seth seemed distracted, at least until he managed to catch Dean in a run, and sent him into the steel post. The match kept going back and forth, first in Dean’s favor, then Seth’s. I cringed as Seth suicide dived right into the ladder Dean was holding, and then again when Dean suplexed Seth into the ladder. I had to look away as Seth went after Dean with a metal chair, flashbacks of that night haunting me. It’s not the same. It’s just a chair, I told myself, but it didn’t really help. Renee squeezed my shoulder in reassurance.

Seth gained control of the match, punishing Dean mercilessly, going after Dean’s knee with the ladder, and then soon after, wrapping Dean’s legs around one of the posts and applying a Figure Four lock, putting pressure on Dean’s injured knee. “You gonna climb the ladder now?! You gonna climb the ladder now?! I’ll show you! I’ll show you who the man is!!” Seth screamed at Dean. I had to choke back a sob.
I took back what I said about Seth needing what Hunter gave him. That’s not Seth, that’s HUNTER brutalizing Dean. I hugged myself, worried about Seth’s mental state in this match. I bit my lip as the match continued. “Please,” I whispered. “Please, you’re better than this, Seth…”

A look passed over Seth’s face, as if remembering something, and a calm settled over him. He then attempted to take out Dean by leading him out into the crowd and throwing him into wall. He ran back to the ring as best he could, and pulled a ladder out from under the ring. He hadn’t quite gotten it out all the way when Dean came back, leaping at Seth and sending them both to the mat. Dean got to his feet first, making a bridge of the ladder between the ring and the announcer’s table. Seth took him out as Dean turned back to deal with Seth. They traded blows back and forth, Seth attempting to powerbomb Dean into the ladder bridge, but getting suplexed into the bridge instead. I gasped as I saw the metal bend under the power of Seth’s body being slammed into it and covered my eyes. When I looked up again, both were up, more or less, and scrambling for another ladder. Dean got to the top, but Seth pulled him down before he could get the belt.

Seth returned the favor a few minutes later and managed to powerbomb Dean into a ladder lying on the floor. When he got up again, he pulled out chair after chair after chair from beneath the ring, then proceeded to bury Dean under the chairs, and even pulled the ladder out from under Dean just to throw it down on top of him. Another ladder was set up in the center of the ring, but before Seth could claim the belt, Dean somehow managed to get to him, latching onto Seth’s leg, yelling, “No! No!” Seth kicked him off, but Dean was, as Renee liked to say, “scrappy” and started climbing the ladder with Seth. They both had their hands on the belt as it pulled free from its place above the ring, the ladder teetered. They fell and landed on the edge of the ring, but only Seth had held onto it.

“He won…” I said softly, a smile blossoming across my face.

“Damn…I was worried for a bit, but that was a good match,” Renee said. “You better get going, girlie. Go see your man.”

I was just happy about being right, I took off at a sprint, as fast I could manage, running through the backstage of the arena.

Hunter was already heading out to meet Seth, but I was determined to see him. I waited patiently backstage. Roman patted my shoulder as he went out to get Dean, Seth walking in with Hunter, the two former brothers glaring at each other.

“And…”

“Not now, Y/N,” Hunter said, cutting me off and turning to Seth. “We have some celebrating to do. Champagne, dinner at the finest restaurant--”

“Actually, Hunter,” Seth said, “Can we do that tomorrow? I’m really beat. Just want to collapse and I’d rather not do that in the middle of a party. Wouldn't want to embarrass you…”

Hunter smiled broadly. “Of course! I'll have the car brought around--”

“I can drive him,” I said, trying to not falter under Hunter’s intense glare. “If you're ok with that, I mean. I'm sure you and Stephanie still want to go out…”

“Fine by me,” Seth said, looking a bit bored. “She owes me dinner anyway.”

I do?
mouth shut!

Geez, fine!

“Hmph, fine. But tomorrow after Raw, we're celebrating.” Hunter glared at me one last time, then left.

**********

I wasn't sure what to say as we walked together to the car. Seth hadn't exactly been welcoming of my presence lately, and seemed to be in a foul mood ever since he saw me after the match.

I dug deep for courage, and said, “Congratulations on winning.”

Seth caught me before I could react, his grip on my arms was uncomfortable but not painful. “Is that all you have to say?” he hissed.

“What do you want from me?” I asked, though I couldn't keep the tremble from my voice. He had gone this long without any meaningful conversation and now he was, what? Confronting me? About what?! I hadn't done anything wrong! I think…

Seth stared at me, looking deeply into my eyes. I felt naked under the scrutiny but I refused to be intimidated. I stared back, but I didn't know what to look for. Instead I took in the image of him. Handsome, of course, but also...he was tired, the beginnings of dark circles under his eyes. I wondered what kept him up, because that was a sure sign of sleep deprivation. Had he been that worried about his match with Dean?

“Are you still angry at me?” he asked suddenly.

“For what?” There was a lot to choose from, he'd have to be more specific.

“For… for betraying you.” He spat out the words like they were poison.

“Oh...no. Not really.” It was the truth. It was painful to think of, and the thought of it still made me sad, but I wasn't angry over it anymore. I had other things to be angry about if I needed to be.

“Why not?” he demanded. “It was a terrible thing I did. Roman and Dean...they're still angry. And you...you trusted me most of all. You looked up to me, turned to me when you needed someone. I was your hero... and I broke that trust with these hands.” He let go of my arm and touched my cheek, his calloused fingers scratching against my skin. “Why aren't you still angry…”

I blinked. “I... I'm just not. Why do you think that having me around is leverage against Roman and Dean? It's not. Honestly, it's more of a powder keg, ready to blow at any second.”

He scowled. “You think I don't know that?? It would be easier if I just let you go back to them.”

“It would,” I agreed, feeling more confused by the second, “but you haven't. Any obstacle that comes up, you sort of just...barrel through it to keep me around. Why won't you let me go? What I do...it's not like they can't get someone else to do it. I'm nobody special.”

“Don't say that…” He was leaning much too close for my comfort. “Don't say you're not special…”

“But I'm not... I'm really not. You said it yourself, you don't need me, and you’re right.”

He pressed his lips in a line, grimacing. He stumbled a bit over his words, “You are... You… You are special. You managed to keep up with Roman, Dean and me...managed to keep us from killing
each other... You took care of us, because you care, not because it's your job. You take care of us still...because you care.” His hand slipped from my cheek to my jawline, almost an intimate gesture. “Do you want to stay with me? As my manager? Or do you want to go back to Roman and Dean? Tell me right now, and I’ll get Hunter and Stephanie to remove you as my manager.”

Back to Roman and Dean? Of course I want that! But... who would be there for you? Who will make sure you keep your head above water as the Authority tries to pull you down to the dark depths?

“I want to stay with you,” I said, my eyes glued to his collarbone. I was fairly certain I would die of embarrassment if I looked him in the eye right now, that he would see right through me. “If that's alright.”

He laughed softly and pulled me into a gentle hug, kissing my forehead softly. “Of course it's alright, dollface. You can fight me all you want, so long as you stay as my manager. And I won't even tell them you said that.”

“Like they'd believe you...and don't call me dollface,” I said, relieved and relaxing into his embrace.

^v^v^v^v^v

Raw - June 15, 2015

The tribute to Dusty was played again on Raw. I was a bit distracted when it first played the night before, but it was a wonderful video, and I shed a few more tears for the legend. I hadn’t been in any of his promo classes, of course, since I was not a wrestler, but I had known him during my time at NXT. He was a good man and he would be missed.

I accompanied Seth out to the ring at the beginning of the show. He was so pleased with himself, I couldn’t help but smile. “Can you hear that, dollface?” he asked.

“Sounds like you really got them fired up.” It was mostly boos, but I knew Seth would spin it.

“Jealous bastards,” he said gleefully. He held the mike up. “Ladies and gentlemen, welcome! To Monday Night RAW!!! Oh, wait, wait, wait. Let me do that again, totally messed up. Welcome to MONDAY NIGHT RAW-LINS! Because, come on.” He pointed down to the belt around his waist and cackled into the microphone. “But seriously, I’d like to take a moment, and thank my opponent, Dean...Ambrose.” He said Dean’s name very deliberately. The crowd went nuts, a few sections chanting Dean’s name.

“You’re about to ignite them more, aren’t you?” I asked, not expecting an answer.

Seth merely smiled at me. “He really brought the fight to me, was definitely on his A-game. But...” That malicious glint in his eye had me rolling mine. “But no matter how good his A-game was...mine was simply better...” The crowd did not like that, and the arena erupted into boos. “Because last night at Money In The Bank, I kept my promise, and I beat Dean Ambrose, all by myself. Yet... there are some people I need to thank, people who have built me up, made me the champion I am today. I mean, I’m just a kid from Davenport, Iowa, and it’s amazing how far I’ve come to be the number one champion in WWE.”

Seth held out his hand to me and I handed him the folded piece of paper he had entrusted to me before we walked out. Downside to his tight pants, no pockets. Not that I was complaining, he looked really good in them.
“Thanks, dollface. Now-- Hey, calm down.” The crowd was getting rowdier. “So I made a list, this is how important this is to me. Come on, real lack of respect from you guys.”

I rolled my eyes and took the microphone from Seth. “Everyone?” The crowd didn’t boo me, at least. “If you would just give a moment of your time, the faster you calm down, the faster he’ll be done and then we can get on with the show.” The crowd cheered at that. Seth raised an eyebrow at me. I held the mike away from me. “What? It’s true, and maybe they’ll play along.” They did calm down enough for him to start reading from the list.

“I’d really like to thank… Seth Rollins. And… Seth Rollins, and Seth Rollins, and Seth Rollins, and Seth Rollins…” He grinned at me.

“You dick.” I folded my arms over my chest and shook my head.

“What? There’s a few more people on here.” The crowd was booing harder now. “Let’s see, there’s Seth Rollins, Seth Rollins, Seth Rollins…”

I really wanted to smack him upside the head, but I couldn’t, not in front of all these people. Instead, I threw my hands up in the air and headed out of the ring.

“I feel like I’m forgetting someone… Oh, right, Seth Rollins. Most importantly-- Where are you going, dollface?”

I ignored him and stepped onto the steel steps.

“Come on, who else would I thank?” he shouted at the crowd. “Dumb and dumber, aka J & J Security? Or maybe the Devil’s favorite doofus, Kane?”

I was standing outside the ring on the apron and yelled out, “How about your mom? Or your dad or stepdad? Or anyone who actually helped you, like your trainers and teachers? You didn’t teach yourself to wrestle, Rollins.”

He shrugged at me. “I didn’t need J & J, I didn’t need Kane. Hell, I didn’t even need Triple H or Stephanie--”

I rolled back into the ring in a flash, grabbing the microphone from Seth and holding it away from him. “Are you insane!? We talked about this!”

He grabbed the mike back from me, damn his long arms. “I didn’t even need Triple H or Stephanie and you know why??” he demanded of me, keeping his hold on my wrist. “Say it.”

“Because that’s how good you are,” I answered in a whisper to him. The mike didn’t pick it up, however. Thankfully.

“Because that’s how good I am,” he repeated, but no one seemed to notice I had answered at all, their eyes all on Seth. He let go of me. “With my performance last night, I might as well be on my way to the Hall of Fame.”

I tried to grab the microphone again, but Seth caught me and held me tight against his side. His belt bit into my back.

“My manager wishes I could be more humble,” he said with a laugh. “But let’s face it! Parents all over the world are going to be naming their children after me! Take a good look, Cleveland. This is the only championship you should be celebrating!” The crowd was near deafening in their disapproval. Then Dean’s music hit, and I wasn’t sure if I would ever be able to use my ears again.
Dean walked out, limping slightly. He stared for a moment at Seth, then began to walk down the ramp with determination. Seth let me go, handing me the belt he had swiftly discarded, and ran out to meet Dean in the middle. They brawled in the middle of the walkway, raining blows down on each other. When Dean threw Seth into the ring, I immediately rolled out. Dean continued his assault, throwing Seth across the ring and out the other side. Seth managed to gain the upper hand by attacking Dean’s injured knee again, but Dean seemed to feed off of the pain, throwing himself at Seth. Seth scrambled away, around the ring, and grabbed me, dragging me down the walkway.

“You stay over here,” he hissed and turned back to deal with Dean, pulling his shirt off as he get ready to jump back in. Dean was in the ring again, taunting Seth.

What good is it to beat up on Dean now?! I screamed in my mind. Dean! What good is it to pick this fight?! I held the belt tightly to my chest, frustrated at my lack of options and abilities to stop them.

Seth stopped before he got to the ring, throwing his hands up in the air. “Forget you!” he shouted at Dean and turned around. He grabbed my arm again and dragged me backstage, ignoring the You suck! and the Coward! jeers he got.

He finally stopped in front of one of the monitors backstage. We could see that Dean was sitting on a chair in the middle of the ring, looking expectantly at the stage entrance. Byron Saxton’s voice could be heard, explaining that Dean was waiting for Seth to come back out. “Rollins…”

“I’m not going back out there. Not jumping just because he says to.” He took his belt back from me, then hugged me awkwardly. “Thanks for not getting in the middle of that,” he mumbled as I hugged him back tentatively. He let go. “Come on.”

I followed him, curious as to where he was going, but I should have known he’d run to Triple H and Stephanie. “What are we going to do about Ambrose? He can’t just be allowed to hold the show hostage. I beat him fair and square last night. This is my title, my show--"

Stephanie held her hand up, “Dean will be taken care of. Are you listening to yourself? Because we are.” The nervous look on Seth’s face pleased me more than it should have. “You just told the world you don’t need anyone. You said you didn’t need us. Twice!”

Seth really began to fidget. “I didn’t-- I mean…”

“You calling my wife a liar?” Hunter asked.

“Nonononono… I would never say that, I would never--”

I interrupted, placing my hand on Seth’s arm. “I think what he means to say is that…he was putting on a show. For everyone who said he couldn’t do it. Yes, he did say he didn’t need you, but he’s a proud, idiotic man.” He glared at me, but didn’t stop me. “Rollins does need you. And he appreciates everything you’ve done for him. He truly does.”

“Yeah,” Seth said, slightly calmer. “I was just saying that for the dummies that said I couldn’t do it without you or anyone else. That’s all. I just want to get back to this,” he pointed to the three of them. I was fine with being left out of the little triad. “Get back to what’s next for the WWE Championship.”

Neither Hunter nor Stephanie looked particularly convinced, but they nodded. “Well,” Hunter said, “We were just discussing what’s next, what is in the future for the Champ. Who your next
challenger will be. Could be anyone, including Dean Ambrose…”

Oh...shit. He’s mad. Hunter wasn’t letting go of the whole “I don’t need you” thing. I had been afraid of that.

“Oh…” Seth’s face fell. “Well, do I get a say in that? I mean… I am the champ…”

Hunter smiled his cruel smile. “You’ll find out along with everyone else, later tonight. We trusted you to defend the championship on your own. Now you can trust us to find the right challenger.”

Stephanie smiled. “Now… scoot along. Not you, Y/N. We would like a moment of your time.”

Seth glanced down at me, hesitant to leave me alone, but Hunter wasn’t a patient man. “Leave, Seth. She’s a big girl. She can take care of herself.” Once Seth had left, I nervously looked at my two bosses. “We just wanted to say that we’ve seen the effort you’ve been putting towards Seth.” I panicked, thinking he meant the kiss on the cheek from last night. “You tried to keep him from putting his foot in his mouth out there, and we appreciate that. So, just a fair warning, if he gets too difficult to handle, I will be taking over, and he won’t enjoy that.” Hunter fairly growled that last part. “Get him in line, or else.”

I nodded. Stephanie was smirking at me. “Now, shoo,” she said, leaning in and waving her fingers at me.

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“What did they want?” Seth asked me, startling me from the dark corner he had hidden in.

“Geez...you’re like a ninja… They told me to make you behave, basically.”

He snorted. “Even you don’t have that ability.”

I shook my head. “I know. Which means I probably won’t be your manager anymore.”

“Wait… What? For real?”

I shrugged. “He didn’t explicitly say that, but that was the gist of it.”

Seth bit his lip. “What do I have to do?”

“Not insist all the time that you don’t need them, for starters,” I said. “Try to keep your temper from getting you into trouble, like accepting challenges for ladder matches without running it by them first.” He grimaced at that. “They just don’t want you to be a loose cannon anymore, Rollins.” They want to control you. I didn’t say that, though it was true.

“I’ll try to rein it in.”

**********

I managed to find out that Dean had won an impromptu match with Sheamus, which I assumed was what Stephanie had meant by “it was taken care of”. Dean left the ring, victorious and strutting a little, despite the limp.

Seth was lost inside his own head as we walked, though he noticed the Jays quickly enough. A moment’s hesitation, then he was his usual cocky asshole self again. “Well, well, well, look who it is.”
I nodded a hello to the two men. “Joey,” I said with a smile. He smiled back at me. “Jamie,” I said a little flatly. I was still mad at him.

“Look, boys, I hate to say I told you so, but…” Seth said, moving in between me and the Jays. I rolled my eyes. Of course he wanted to be the center of attention. “I told you so. I didn’t need your help. I beat Dean Ambrose all on my own. And why? Because I’m just that damn good.” He smiled, but I saw the slight tic in his cheek. “I’m willing to bring you back in the fold, if, uh…if you maybe have any inside info on who Steph and Hunter are thinking about for my next opponent, maybe?” He was rambling. Oh, man, it was so cute to see him so nervous.

Jamie smirked and Joey gave me a knowing grin. “Well, Seth, I don’t know who they’re choosing, and even if I did, I wouldn’t tell you.” Seth relaxed back into the cocky asshole mode. “BUT, they should look at who pinned the champ just last week, in the middle of the ring, clean as a whistle. My boy, Joey Mercury.” Jamie thumped Joey on the back. Joey gazed at the belt resting on Seth’s shoulder with longing.

“Whoa, whoa, whoa,” Seth said. “I didn’t think you could get any dumber, Jamie. Have you ben drinkin’ yer granddaddy’s moonshine again?” Seth asked in a poor imitation of Jamie’s accent. I smacked his arm. “No one wants to see me whip Joey’s ass. I think you two are just skulking around here, waiting to see if I’ll give you your jobs back. I think—”

“I think,” Joey said, shaking his head, “I think you’re afraid of me.”

Seth threw back his head melodramatically and laughed. “Oh ho ho ho. I am not–”

“I wasn’t finished!” Joey said, jabbing a finger in front of Seth’s face. Both Seth and I were taken aback. “I know you’re afraid of getting back in the ring with me, because the record books will always show that Seth Rollins LOST to J & J Security. It’s not a matter of if you lose the title. It’s a matter of when. Good luck out there,” Joey said, patting Seth on the back. “Later, sweetheart,” he said to me.

Seth glared at me as I blushed. Joey and Jamie left, laughing to themselves.

“What the hell was that about?” he asked. “Are you dating that idiot or something?”

“He’s not an idiot,” I said defensively. “And no, we’re not dating. I mean…he’s married. Why do you keep assuming I’d date a married man?”

“I think that means you’d say yes if he wasn’t?! I thought you hated him!”

I shrugged, feeling the blush spread to my entire face. “I don’t like Jamie. Joey, on the other hand… I might… I would have consider it… I mean… He’s nice to me, he’s not a wrestler, technically speaking…”

Seth fumed. “He’s just after you to get to me! They all might be!”

I rolled my eyes. Of course that was what he was worried about. “Obviously, if anyone that asks me out is the one that gets the next title shot, that is definitely a possibility. I wouldn’t turn down a free meal and good conversation just because—” Seth looked like he was about to explode, so I quickly said, “But, I won’t say yes if anyone should ask me out, ok? I don’t exactly have a love life, so why start now?” It wasn’t a big deal to me, but it calmed Seth down. Well, relatively calmed him down. He was still pissed about the entire exchange with the Jays.

“You’re not dating anyone at all?” he asked.
Seth grunted an ambiguous reply.

**********

Seth lay in wait for Kane. I just stood in the hallway, giving Kane a smile right before Seth popped out of his hiding spot. “Sorry about this,” I whispered to the large man. He had just finished a match with Randy Orton, changing the rules of the match to include interference by Sheamus as legal, and had won. Big surprise there. Still, he was being friendly to me, and I had long ago accepted the fact that while Kane didn’t need interference to win, he enjoyed using that power as Director of Operations to make others squirm.

“It’s fine,” he told me. “What do you want, Seth?”

“I just wanted to say congratulations. You must be in a much better mood after that win than you were last night after that awful loss. I would be, if I were you.” Seth smiled sweetly at Kane, who glared back at him.

“I repeat, what do you want, Seth? Not in the mood for your shenanigans, win or not.”

“Rollins…” I said in a warning tone. “Just get on with it.”

“Well, I just wanted to point out that unlike you, Kane, I won last night. And you… oh ho ho ho, you were one of my biggest doubters! How does it feel to be proven wrong?”

“For the love of…” I muttered. “This is what you wanted to talk to him about?”

“Don’t worry about it, Y/N,” Kane said, putting his hand on my shoulder, but still glaring at Seth. “See, unlike Seth, I realize how truly childish this is. Unlike him, I realize that anyone can win on one night, but to win night after night after night, continuously defending the championship… Well, that takes more than one person. You might even say it takes a whole team of people. And if he doesn’t understand that, he’s not an architect. He’s an idiot. No one, and I mean no one, can do it on their own.” I suddenly felt like there was too little room between the two men, and there I was, stuck between them.

Seth’s temper was flaring, and I turned to him, placing my hands on his chest. “Rollins, think about what you’re going to say before saying it.”

“Oh, I don’t need to think about it. Kane is just jealous of what I have. It reminds him of what he’s lost, of what he no longer is--” I covered Seth’s mouth. He licked my palm, but I grimaced and held on. He grabbed ahold of my wrists next and pulled my hand away. Damn his strength! “I can do this on my own! I did it last night, I’ll continue to do it every night if I have to! Someone like you, Kane, you wouldn’t understand that. You’ve always had someone backing you… the Corporation, the Authority, Paul Bearer, your brother--”

Kane’s hand snaked past my head, grabbing a hold of Seth’s shirt. His other arm went around me protectively as he pulled Seth in close. Seth was breathing heavily, his eyes dilated with fear. “Let me make something clear. Never… never talk about my family!” Kane growled, his voice suddenly gravely and dark. “Or I will eviscerate you.”

Seth pushed away from him, escaping his hold. He looked at me, still in Kane’s grasp, but I was not in any danger. He pushed back the fear he had felt when Kane threatened him and collected his cool. “Never put your hands on me again! I am the world heavyweight champion! And let Y/N go!”
She has nothing to do with this.”

Kane looked down at me as I looked up at him. “Please?” I asked politely. He nodded and released me. “Thank you, Kane.”

“Don’t thank him!” Seth said, temper flaring again. “You know what, Kane, I hope Stephanie and Triple H name you as my next challenger. I look forward to putting your ass out to pasture, you sad excuse for a human being.” Seth turned on his heel and walked away.

I could hear Kane huffing behind me, and I turned to him. “Kane… I’m so sorry… I should have known-- I should have convinced him to not speak to you--”

Kane growled, but he was looking in the direction Seth had gone off in. When he looked at me, his eyes softened. “You deserve a better champion to be manager to,” he said. “Best get along now. Who knows what sort of trouble that asshole will get himself into next.”

I hesitated for a moment, then hugged Kane before leaving to find Seth.

**********

Roman found me first. “Where is he?” he roared.


“Bray Wyatt!”

I flinched from the sheer volume. A few stage hands ran away. “I don’t know. I haven’t seen him at all. Why? What happened?” Roman was pacing back and forth. I grabbed his arm. “Roman! What happened??”

Roman’s jaw clenched, and his muscles were tense under my hand. “He threatened Jojo…”

I gasped, my hand flying to my mouth. “No…”

“I’m going to kill him. Soon as I find him, I’m ripping him in half!”

I thought quickly. “I don’t know where he is, but I know he tends to linger in the darker parts of the arena back areas. Sets up a camp of sorts. Roman, if you go after him tonight… please, be careful. He may have Luke Harper and Erick Rowen at his side. Dean’s preoccupied with getting revenge on Seth, and I’m more of hindrance as an ally--”

Roman hugged me tightly. “I’ll be careful, baby girl. I promise.” He left, and I could only say a small prayer that he stay safe.

**********

I finally found Seth fuming in a corner. “Rollins…” I said softly. “Come on, Triple H and Stephanie are about to announce who your contender is going to be…”

“Did you find out who it’s going to be?”

“No. They’re keeping it close to the chest. But, I really don’t think it’s anyone you’ve suspected so far.” I was at a loss at who they would choose. There was absolutely no chatter on it among the stagehands.

“Let’s go, dollface.”
“Don’t call me that. Where are we going?”

“To see Stephanie and Hunter. That’s where.”

**********

I stood next to Seth in the ring, Stephanie and Hunter standing just a few feet in front of us. Seth had interrupted their announcement when he heard Hunter list off everyone who was not going to be his opponent, a huge smile on his face. “It doesn’t matter who it is,” he declared, “Whoever it is, I’ll embarrass them and send them home crying to their parents. I’ll win, and make you proud.”

I didn’t like the little smile on Hunter’s face, or the matching one on Stephanie’s, but it was too late to pull Seth out of there.

“I’m glad you said that,” Hunter said. “You’ve defended the championship. You beat everyone that’s come before you, and we are proud of you.”

But… I thought.

“Yes, very proud,” Stephanie said. “But you’re a very polarizing figure. Literally, the only person still by your side is your manager, Y/N, and that’s only because we pay her to be there.”

I clenched my fists, and had to remember that I cannot hit my boss, no matter what. I settled for touching Seth’s arm ever so slightly, trying to let him know that that wasn’t true. It had been, at first, but now…

“Some might say,” Stephanie continued, “that without the Authority, you’re ripe for the pickin’! And to be honest, you’ve been trying our patience for a while now. Therefore, you may have something a little bit left to prove.”

Hunter spoke, “Seth, we have invested in the future, in you, and sometimes, you have to take a step back and reevaluate, decide if that investment is worth the cost, or if it’s not. If the lump of coal, when put under pressure, will crumble, turn to dust... or will it become the diamond you hoped it would be.”

Seth was nodding along. Oh, Seth, you don’t see the trap closing around you, do you?

Hunter continued. “So, Seth, the question is, are you the diamond we’ve invested in, or will you turn to dust? Because…” I could practically feel the vise closing in. “Because the pressure is on, Seth. And the time to prove yourself, is now.”

“I’m ready,” Seth said. “I’m ready for this. For anyone.”

I was frantic, desperately trying to think of who they possibly could get on the roster to possibly drive home the lesson they seemed to want to give to Seth. They weren’t about to reward Dean or Roman, Randy possibly, but his focus was on Sheamus at the moment, and vice versa, plus Sheamus had just won the contract. Ryback currently held the intercontinental championship. Kevin Owens was a possibility, but he had just attacked Machine Gun Kelly and even the Authority wouldn’t let something like that slide. Who?? Who could it be--

The music that hit the speakers was the last theme I expected to hear, a screeching horror followed by intense rock. The look on Seth’s face told me it was the same for him. Brock… Lesner?! I turned around slowly to see Brock and Paul Heyman walking out and down to the ring. The crowd went nuts. Brock circled the ring, Paul not far behind him. Brock jumped up onto the apron of the ring, like he owned it. And considering his reputation, he might as well have. Seth was frozen next
to me as the crowd began to chant *Suplex City.*

Hunter pulled me out of the ring with Stephanie. “Still believe in Seth Rollins?” he asked me, a little amusement in his voice.

“Brock is one of the most dangerous wrestlers in the business,” I said. There was a *reason* they called him The Beast. “And you can't control him should he actually win!”

“So you do believe Seth has a chance. Interesting,” Stephanie said. Brock was stalking slowly towards Seth in the ring. Seth looked like he was afraid of moving too quickly, lest he spook the Beast into attacking, and was backing out in our direction.

“I just… I don't understand your choice in contenders,” I said.

“Pressure, Y/N,” Hunter said. “What he needs right now is *pressure.*”

Seth rolled out of the ring, keeping his eyes on Brock. Hunter motioned toward the ring and Brock when Seth looked at him for guidance.

“Go on, champ. Show him what you got,” Hunter said. Seth was like a deer in the headlights. I couldn't blame him.

I took his arm and lead him away from the ring. “Running away?” Paul taunted us.

I turned to him. “Of course not. Your client is *Brock Lesner,*” I said, enunciating it just like Paul did. “My client will fight yours, at Battleground, and we are merely retreating in order to strategize. Is that too much to ask?”

Paul put his hands in the air in surrender. “Fine by me. Brock?”

Brock looked me up and down, then Seth. “Sure. Little miss champion can strategize all he wants. I'll be taking *my* belt back soon enough.”

I felt a chill run up my spine as he spoke so casually about the championship. “We will see you soon, gentlemen.” I bowed respectfully and continued to guide Seth backstage. We were alone in his private locker room when he finally said something.

“I'm fighting Brock Lesner…at Battleground…”

“Looks like it,” I said. “You ok?”

He nodded, then shrugged, then shook his head. “It's the fucking *Beast.* Only way I was able to get it from him in the first place was because I pinned Roman…”

“True. But you utilized strategy, and you will do it again.” I smiled at him. “I believe in you. You can beat him.” He snorted. “I mean it! Probably not head on, a pure physical battle, but up here,” I tapped his forehead, “I'm sure you'll come up with some ideas to get around his brawn.”

“You think so?”

It was my turn to snort. “You're the *Architect.* Of course I think you can do it.”

“Thanks, dollface. That means a lot.”

“Don't call me dollface.”
I sat by myself in one of the available offices, going over the responses to people who wanted Seth to make an appearance at their business or event. Hunter had told me I didn't need to, that he had a guy handling it, but I was starting to worry over the amount of engagements the man was accepting on Seth's behalf. I had let Hunter have his way, simply because I was quite intimidated by him, but this was Seth's well being at stake. I was going to have to put my foot down. Hunter didn't like it, but I was insisting.

“You still owe me a birthday present.”

I turned to see Seth staring at me. “Oh. You never told me what you wanted. And then--”

He waved me off. “Yeah, yeah, I know why. Now that we're on good terms again, I'm calling you on it.” He fidgeted a little. “And...it'll be a nice distraction from the whole Brock Lesner thing.”

Well, when he put it that way… “Fine. What do you want?”

“I want you to go with me to a concert. There's a show for State Champs this weekend, in the same town we'll be in. You'll like them. I already bought the tickets but you can buy me some merchandise or dinner or something.” He was grinning. I raised an eyebrow at him and his odd request. I had never even heard of this group, but then again, Seth had never been one to steer me wrong on music.

“If that's what you want, I think it's doable. What day is it?”

“Saturday night, seven o’clock.”

I checked his schedule. He had a late promotion that day, at a toy store, but I could exercise my authority as his manager and make sure he got out in time. It would give us about an hour to travel to the venue. “Ok. We can make it work.”

“Thanks, dollface.”

“**********

“You had to know Roman wouldn't just stand by and let you beat down his best friend,” I told Kane, holding an ice pack to his face. Kane and Sheamus had attempted to beat up Dean under the guise of a two-on-one handicap match. He grunted and I sighed. “Look, I get that you're upset, and I understand why, but you can't pick fights with just anyone. It's dangerous, especially since Roman's been itching for an outlet for his rage. Still can't believe Bray threatened little Jojo. She's such a sweetheart… It's like threatening a newborn puppy!”

“I guess I can agree with that,” he mumbled. “I made a tag team match, just so you know. Me and Sheamus, Roman and Dean. ‘Fair’, more or less.”

“Well, good luck in that. You're going to need it.”

“Thanks,” he said with a slight smile.

“**********

“Don't see why you had to tend to that jerk,” Seth said. He had found me talking with Kane and
helping him ice his bruises. “He's got people who can help him.”

I rolled my eyes. “Rollins, what would you say is my best quality?”

He looked me up and down slowly, making my skin heat up. He grinned. “Well, you do have a nice ass--”

I shoved him, trying to not let his smartass comment throw me off. “Be serious. It's the fact that I'm nice. Genuinely nice. And besides, I like Kane for the most part. I might even call him a friend.”

Seth snorted. “Whatever. You always did have a soft touch for sad sacks. You ready?”

“Whenever you are.”

His music hit and we walked down to the ring together. Once inside, he was given a microphone to address the crowd. “I am the biggest WWE superstar and I am the world heavyweight champion, the undisputed future of this company. Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, I am under constant scrutiny, working non-stop… and do I ever get a ‘thank you’, a pat on the back?” I raised an eyebrow at him. “Except for my manager,” he said quickly, “all I ever get is disrespect. And this week… oh ho ho ho, this week has taken it to a new level, because all I've been asked is ‘Seth, how do you feel facing Brock Lesner?’ How do I feel? I'll tell you this… On Monday night Raw, when I heard Brock’s music, I'll admit, I was shocked. Brock is literally the last person I expected for Triple H and Stephanie to name as my opponent. Y/N, agree or disagree?”

He held the microphone out to me. “Agree. He didn't even cross my mind, and he should have. I am ashamed of myself for not considering him.”

“Well,” Seth said, taking the microphone back, “To be fair, he was suspended indefinitely. You remember, for assaulting WWE employees. That cameraman, Michael Cole, throwing J & J at you…” He pointed at me. I hadn’t forgotten about that day, how Seth had abandoned me, and I glared at him. He seemed to realize his error and moved on. “But…as the shock faded, and Brock circled the ring like a shark…” That is NOT when the shock wore off, I thought to myself. I wasn’t completely convinced he wasn’t still in shock. “I thought to myself, this is right. Of course it should be Brock Lesner. How else can I command the respect I deserve if I don't beat him?”

Maybe by not being a dick to everyone? Just my opinion though.

“I am the Architect. If anyone can beat him, it's me. And that’s not an empty claim. Brock… he’s brawn, no doubt about that. Me? I’m brains and brawn. So, the question shouldn’t be, ‘how do I feel about facing Lesner?’ It should be, ‘how does Lesner feel about facing me?’” He dropped the mike in the middle of the ring and headed out. ‘Let’s go, dollface.”

**********

Roman and Dean’s tag team match with Sheamus and Kane promised to be interesting, if a bit intense.

I was not disappointed. It was like they were all trying to work out their aggressions on their opponents, which they likely were. It bothered me that Kane had decided to team up with the man who now held the Money In The Bank contract. It was something he would do, of course, but Stephanie and Hunter were fine with it. It made me wonder, were they getting ready to cut Seth loose? Were they grooming Sheamus to be his replacement?

Roman knocked Sheamus down with a Superman Punch and was about to go for the pin when a voice was heard over the speakers. “I'm a little…teapot…” Bray sang slowly, deliberate with each
Roman didn’t see Sheamus’s boot until too late. Sheamus pinned Roman while Bray just laughed and laughed… I was running out to the ring before I could think, phone in hand as it rang Roman’s house number in Pensacola. Sheamus and Kane were strutting proudly up the ramp as I ran past. The lights went out, a chill going through the air, and then the lights were back on. Roman sat in the middle of the ring, a piece of paper in his hand. As I rolled into the ring and knelt at his side, I saw it wasn’t just a piece of paper. It was a photo. The same photo Bray had taunted Roman with on Monday, of JoJo smiling so sweetly as she played tea party with her father.

“Ro…” I said with a slight gasp. I heard the click of the phone line as someone picked up.

“Auntie Y/N?”

“Hey Jojobean,” I said. “I have your daddy here, and he could really use your voice right about now.”

“Daddy!” she said with excitement. Roman smiled weakly at me, and took the phone.

“Go backstage,” I told him. “I’ll get Dean.” He nodded and left the ring. Dean was dazed, but I was able to get him backstage as well.

Seth watched us from a distance. “Stalker…” Dean muttered.

“Hush, Dee. Let the medics check you and make sure you don’t have a concussion.” He lay back on the bed. “Rini will be here in a bit. She’ll fix you right up.”

Dean settled into the bed. “Magic kisses. Yes, please.”

“Idiot,” I said with a giggle. “You’ll be just fine.” I kissed his forehead before walking over to Seth.

“He gonna be ok?” Seth asked.

“He’ll be fine. You know how hard his head is.”

Seth nodded. “Like a concrete wall… And, uh… Roman?”

“Worried, Rollins?” He shrugged and I shook my head. “He’s shaken, but I can’t blame him. Bray’s going for the emotional jugular. Everyone knows how much Roman loves his daughter. She’s his world. I can only imagine what I would do if someone went after my kid like Bray’s doing.”

“And what would that be?” Seth asked.

I looked straight into his eyes. “I’d kill them.”

“Damn, dollface. You do not play around.” Seth looked at me appreciatively.

“I never play around when it comes to my family, Rollins. Just to let you know, if Roman needs me, I will be helping him. No one threatens my family and gets away with it. No one.”

**********

Saturday night, it took a lot of internal swearing, some major sweet talking, and the patience to not slap the handsy manager of the business, but I got Seth out and on the road. I drove as Seth acted as...
navigator. We only got lost once, and it was because the street was poorly marked.

The venue was packed, and Seth was wearing a disguise so as not to draw notice to himself.

“It's the blond streak that makes you most recognizable,” I pointed out. He had been growing it out, but had refused to just dye it black, for some reason.

“There's not a lot I can do unless I cut it off,” he countered. I stared at the blond streak, wheels turning in my head. “Why are you staring at me like that…”

We were still outside, sitting on a bench, waiting for the opening band to start. “Sit facing forward,” I told him, getting up and walking around the bench to stand behind him. He looked nervous but did as I said. I didn't have a lot to work with, but between my childhood skills with braids and the extra hair tie I had, I was able to hide the blond hair fairly well. Combined with his disguise, and you couldn't tell it was him unless you really took a hard look. “There. At least it's less noticeable now.”

The crowd inside started to get rowdy as the music began. Seth mumbled a thanks and led me into the venue. We stayed at the back for extra security in his anonymity. The music was nice, but sounded a bit generic to my ears.

State Champs didn't take the stage until nearly nine o'clock. It was different from what I expected. The first song was soft, lovely, and I was swaying along to the music. It was the kind of song I liked to dance to when I was in a ballet mood. Not that I know ballet, but I like to pretend. The lead vocalist was amazing and I closed my eyes as the wonderful sounds caressed my ears.

“Enjoying yourself?” Seth asked in a quiet moment between songs. He was standing next to me and I had almost forgotten he was there. The music changed to a more upbeat song. I grinned and nodded.

I really liked the band, and even danced a bit, as much as I was able to in the small space. The fourth song in, I felt hands on my hips from behind me, and being pulled back, a very male appendage grinding into me. I turned to see a man, one who didn't look like the rest of the attendees. His hair was slicked back, he reeked of cologne, and seemed more interested in getting into my pants than enjoying the music. I pushed him away, but he came right back. Shut him down. I spun around, landing an elbow to the side of his head. He fell back a few steps, “What the hell, bitch?!”

Seth had noticed and pushed the guy. “What the hell are you doing to my girl?!”

I grit my teeth as the man paled and was immediately apologetic. Of course he would back down to a man and not the woman he wronged. “Hey, man...sorry, she looked alone…”

“Don't apologize to me! Apologize to her!” Seth snarled. A few of the people around us were chiming in with Yeah, apologize to her. The man looked startled, but turned to me and said a half hearted Sorry before turning tail and leaving. “Fucker…” Seth mumbled. “You ok?”

“Yeah...thanks,” I said. I hated that it took being “claimed” for that man to back off, but at least I knew Seth had my back. “Let's just enjoy the music.”

I turned back to the stage, and immediately turned around again when arms went around my waist. “Just me, dollface. Want to make sure it doesn't happen again.”

“Oh, ok…” I focused on the band and their music. Seth kept me safe from the rowdier attendees and from any other potential “admirers”, and I was able to get back to the good mood I had been in.
while listening to the band.

When we checked in to the hotel we were staying at for the night, I waited until we parted ways at the elevator to say, “Um, I had fun tonight. Thank you, for asking me to go with you.”

“Thanks for going with me. And for the shirt. And the poster. And the mug.” He had gotten a little crazy when he asked for merchandise, but I had been feeling generous and he had helped me with the creep.

“You're welcome, Rollins. Happy belated birthday.”

He opened his mouth to say something, but thought better of it and merely said, “Night, dollface.”

“Goodnight, Rollins. Don't call me dollface.”
Apologies From A Beast

Raw - June 22, 2015

I wasn’t paying close attention and nearly missed the obvious. My eyes went wide and soon as the moment had passed, I was running for Seth. I found him sitting quietly in his private locker room. “Seth!”

He looked up at me curiously. “What’s up, dollface? Look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

I was breathing hard as I told him what I saw. “Brock is here!”

We both watched as Paul Heyman had the video from Wrestlemania and the Raw after Wrestlemania played back, and then explained what it took for Brock to come back.

“An apology…” I said in disgust. “That’s what they let him back in for? An apology?! He destroyed half the arena that night!”

“Calm down. You’re going to pop a blood vessel,” Seth said. We listened as Paul berated Seth, “apologizing” that Brock would destroy him at Battleground. “I’ll kill that fat slob!”

“Calm down. You’re going to pop a blood vessel,” I mocked him. He glared at me and I stuck my tongue out at him. I turned back to monitor. “Tch, your damned beast is not getting the championship back. I’m sorry, Paul, but it’s not going to happen.”

Seth laughed at that. “I like your confidence.”

“Like you don’t have a plan. I don’t know what it is, but I’m sure you have one.” I looked over at him. “You do have a plan, right?”

“Of course I do… It’s… uh… kind of a long shot though.” He looked doubtful about it.

“Do you need some help with it?”

“I’m not sure. I just… I have to get on Kane’s good side.” He gave me the sad, puppy dog look. “You’re friends with him–”

I held my hand up. “He’s not going to help me if he’s still mad at you. If you want to get on Kane’s good side, you have to be nice to him. Show him you’re willing to make amends. Can you do that, Rollins?”

“Of course! Whether he believes me or not, that’s another matter.”

I couldn’t disagree with that.

Of course his idea of making amends was helping Kane win a match against Dean. I sighed as Kane looked at Seth with confusion as he walked towards us. Seth had distracted Dean merely by walking out. And had taken a punch, which allowed Kane to get the upper hand in the match.

We all walked together down the arena hallway. “What do you want, Seth?” Kane asked. Very no
“That was a fantastic match,” Seth said. “When we work like that, just like old times… We’re unstoppable!”

Kane stopped short. “I’m sorry, we??” He looked over at me. “Is he high? I’m going to have to order a drug test.”

“He’s clean,” I assured him. “Rollins just wants… to apologize.”

“Yeah, what she said. Look, man, I’ve been thinking a lot. We worked so well together and…well, I think we need to get the band back together.”

“Oh my gosh, please tell me I just hallucinated you saying that,” I said. It was so corny! Kane laughed, but Seth just glared at me.

“Why would I want to help you after all of the disrespect you’ve shown me?” Kane asked, still chuckling. “Oh, right, you have a match coming up with Brock Lesner and you need backup.”

“Hey! I beat Brock Lesner at Wrestlemania to earn this title,” Seth hissed. “I’ll destroy him at Battleground, and I don’t need help!” I elbowed him hard in the ribs. “I mean, this isn’t about Brock. This is about you, and me… Y/N… this is about family. So… what do you say?” Seth put his hand out to Kane, who looked down at it, looked over at me, then back to Seth, scoffed, and walked away.

“Well, that went well,” I said. “Are you going to pitch that same speech to the Jays, because I’m sure they would love to hear it.”

“Why do you assume I’ll talk to them?” he demanded.

I shrugged. “Logical assumption. You were closer to them than you were to Kane, so…it makes sense.”

“Maybe…look, can you try talking to Kane? Just… try to get him to at least consider coming back to Team Rollins?” He gave me the puppy dog eyes again. I made a face. Why did he have to be so darn good at that?

“Fine. But it’s not going to help.”

**********

“Kane!” I called out, running after him. Thank goodness he was walking slow. “I am so sorry about Rollins. He’s… He’s trying to make amends, he really is. Possibly for help, but he’s going up against Brock. That is not a man he can simply outwrestle.”

“So, you’re saying he can’t beat Brock on his own?”

I was taken aback by the question. For all the faith I had in Seth’s ability, Brock Lesner was definitely someone he couldn’t deal with like anyone else. “He can, but he needs to pull every trick he can think of.” I looked up at Kane. “Could you? Beat Brock on your own?”

Kane grinned. “Fair point. I’ll tell you what, if he gets down on his knees, in front of the entire WWE universe, I’ll consider helping him.”

“You just want to see him humble himself and have absolutely no intention of helping, don’t you?”
I couldn’t help but laugh. Kane just grinned harder. “I’ll tell him, but I doubt he’ll fall for it.”

**********

I found Seth coming out of the general locker room. “What were you doing in there?”

“Oh, dollface… I, uh, was just looking for J & J. They…uh, well…”

“They gave you the same answer as Kane, didn’t they?” He nodded.

“It’s fine. I think I got what I need… Let’s go.”

**********

Seth was spouting some nonsense about the Authority being a *family* to Hunter and Stephanie. I honestly couldn’t tell how serious he was about it. “I really see this as more than a business arrangement,” he said. “And I want to be on good terms with Kane and J & J again.”

“You've got your little sister,” Stephanie pointed out with a not nice grin. “That's something. And if you really want to make amends with the guys, an apology would really go a long way.”

“An apology? You think so? Because if they apologized to me--”

I elbowed Seth in the ribs, but I don't think he quite understood my intention. Hunter and Stephanie did, at least. “You want those guys back,” Hunter said, “because you’re *scared* of Brock Lesner.”

“I'm not scar--”

“We invested a lot in you, and we believe that you are *ready* for Brock. You're scared, because you're smart. If you weren't scared, you'd be an idiot. A smart man, such as yourself, would have a plan. A smart man would have a backup plan, because there should always be a Plan B.”

I stiffened at his words, from both the memories of his own Plan Bs, and the intent behind his words. Hunter was *pissed*.

“A smart man would go down to that ring, and say three little words. A smart man would humble himself and say, *I am sorry.* A smart man would know that saying these words could make his problems go away.”

Seth shifted uncomfortably. He still didn't believe himself to be in the wrong, and I agreed with him, up to a point. He didn't need anyone else to be the best, but he was a member of the Authority, and if he didn't play nice, they would turn him out in the cruelest way possible. The chances of him keeping his belt were zero in that case.

“I think you know what you have to do,” Stephanie said quietly.

Hunter patted the title belt on Seth's shoulder. “If you want to keep your *family*, a smart man has to make sacrifices.”

I could see Seth's jaw clench. He nodded and walked out of the office. I followed. We didn't say anything for a while, until we got to Seth's locker room.

“Do you think I should apologize? Tell them that I need them to win against Brock?”

“Do you feel that you do? It's ok to say that you do.”
“But I don’t need them.”

“I know.”

“Then I shouldn’t apologize--”

“But you seem to want them back, for whatever reason. The timing is suspicious, I might add, so it’s little wonder that they think it’s because of Brock.” I looked past him. “Seth, I have faith that you can do this on your own. I really do. By hook or crook, you will find a way, even if you have to break rules to do it. But just because you can do something on your own, doesn’t mean you have to do it. I don’t like it when you use them for direct interference, to break the rules...but bending the rules, like the Shield did...” I sighed and gave a little laugh. “I guess you guys did break the rules as well, didn’t you? Do you remember...two years ago, Elimination Chamber, you guys were up against John Cena, Ryback, and Sheamus? And everyone thought that if the odds were evened, then you guys wouldn’t stand a chance? Not that you listened, of course. It didn’t look good, but you guys...you powered through it, and you won. You won. Against Sheamus. Ryback. Cena. Three huge names in the company. And why? Because you had each other, you worked together, and you trusted in each other. If you hadn’t...I don’t think you would have done that.”

Seth picked at some invisible lint on his shirt. “That was a long time ago.” It was. How had I forgotten the teamwork they had once had also contained shortcuts? How had I forgotten that I had been fine with it then, cheered them on, and even helped them develop new ways to get around the rules? My memory wore rose-colored glasses, I suppose. Going forward, I needed to reevaluate how close minded I was to the same strategy Seth used with Kane and the Jays.

“True. I’m just trying to make a point. If you want them back, even just for moral support, then apologize. They may not accept your apology, so be ready for that. They were all very offended by your words, your venom towards them. Just...try to see it from their side. You would be livid if you were treated the same way you treated them.”

His shoulders dropped a little. “I’ll take that under advisement.”

**********

“This is messed up…” I whispered, looking around the room Roman had found. He had abandoned his match when Bray appeared on the big screen above the ramp, implying that Jojo was “having tea” with him. The walls were covered in pictures of Roman, his eyes completely scratched out. “Have you reported this to--”

“They’re not going to do shit, baby girl, and you know it.” I couldn’t argue with him on that. “I’ll handle this. By myself if I have to.”

“Dean will help you, if you ask. So will I. I already warned Rollins I would.” I hugged Roman, though he only gave me a stiff embrace in return.

“Thank you, Y/N. I’ll let you know.”

**********

I stood with Seth in the ring as he stared his intent to apologize, and asked Kane, Jamie and Joey to come out. We had to wait a moment before hearing Kane's music, and watched as the three men walked out to the ring. Joey and Kane each gave me a smile, but frowned as they looked at Seth.

“Welcome, gentlemen,” Seth said. “After a lot of thinking, and under the guidance of my manager, I realized that a team is only as good as its foundation, and you three are this team’s foundation.
Before I say anything further, I would like to say that this is not about Brock Lesner. I beat the Beast once, and I will do it again. No, this is about us, about our family—"

The crowd had started chanting and by now we're loud enough for us to hear. Suplex city! Clap clap, clap clap clap. Suplex city! Clap clap, clap clap clap.

“Shhhhh-shut up! I'm trying to make an apology here!” Seth yelled at them. The crowd cheerfully ignored him and continued to chant and clap. “Ugh. Look, Joey, Jamie. I am so sorry. Like I said in the back, you and I are cut from the same cloth. We are champions. All of us. I have looked up to guys for so long, and patterned my in-ring style after you. You've had my back and you have always been there for me. We shared so much in the time that we've been together, and I made a stupid mistake. I apologize, to both of you, individually and collectively, from the bottom of my heart. I would love it if you would be part of my family again.”

The crowd started to chant No! No! No! as Jamie and Joey whispered between each other.

“Ok, guys, just...uh… take a minute? Yeah, just take a minute while I talk to Kane…” He turned to the taller man. “Kane, I am so sorry. Sorry that I disrespected you. Sorry that I said all those horrible, and untrue things. Growing up, I looked up to you and it’s been an honor working with you. I just… I got in over my head, and I’m sorry.”

I wondered if as Seth was saying this to Kane and the Jays, he was imagining Roman and Dean like I was. I hoped I could hear him apologize someday. The Shield may never come back together, but couldn’t we at least be a family again? Not as long as he’s with the Authority, I thought sadly.

Kane and the Jays were speaking to each other in whispers, considering Seth’s words, when Brock’s music hit. I felt like the wind was knocked out of me. Brock and Paul made their way down the ramp. Kane and the Jays turned, standing side by side with Seth. I held my breath, nervous about our position. Brock got to the edge of the ring, and looked straight at Kane, then each of the Jays, who looked at Seth and walked away. My heart dropped as they left the ring.

“Wait!” Seth called to them. Kane still had one leg through the ropes, and turned back to us. “Take Y/N with you. Keep her safe. Please?”

“What?! Seth, no! I’ll stand with you--” Seth grabbed me by the waist, and carried me to Kane. “Seth!”

“Take her with you,” he repeated to Kane. Kane looked at me, then nodded to Seth, hefting me over the ropes easily.

“Kane! No! Let me go!” I struggled against him, but he was much too strong. “Kane!”

“Sorry, Y/N, but he’s right. You shouldn’t be in there with him. Too dangerous.”

“Kane! Please! He needs help!” I pleaded. “He can’t take on Brock alone! Not like this!”

Kane set me down far from the ring. Joey took my hands in his. “Hey... calm down. Breathe in-- Don't look at Brock or Seth, just look at me. Breathe in, hold... and breathe out. There... and now you can look.” I turned just in time to see Kane knock Brock to the ground. “Now, sweetheart, J &J have to go to work. Stay out harm’s way.”

I nodded, shocked by the turn of events, and watched as the four “brothers” of the Authority systematically took Brock Lesner down. Seth was screaming victoriously by the end of it, holding Kane and Joey’s arms up in celebration. Jamie had taken a hard spear from Brock, right into the
barricade, but I helped him up to the ring so that he could join in.

“The family is back together,” Seth said to me, smiling and hugging me. “Isn't that great?”

I didn't say anything, but gave him a small smile.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - June 25, 2015

Seth, Kane, Joey and I started off Smackdown. “Ladies and gentlemen. The Authority. Is. BACK!” Seth said happily. “The band is back together, we went to Suplex City, and we burned it to the ground!” The crowd booed, which we all ignored. I just didn’t care one way or the other, and the others were too stoked about their win on Monday. “You'll notice, however, that one of our family is missing tonight. Jamie Noble, our brother in arms, was taken to a medical facility after Raw, due to the three ribs Brock broke as he drove Jamie into the barricade. We spent all night with him, nobody sleeping a wink…” I could attest to that. Worst night ever. Joey had been a sweetheart and let me nap on his shoulder until Seth declared no one would sleep until Jamie was able to. Damn concussions and damn solidarity! “But, Jamie will pull through, so everyone, give a thunderous applause to Jamie Noble!”

The crowd booed, of course. I couldn’t blame them. It was pretty hokey, all of this hullabaloo, but Seth wasn’t deterred and continued to congratulate and praise the guys. Eventually, Kane called out Ryback, who took the opportunity to insult Seth and call him a false champion and “an overprotected, gutless child”. I tried to calm Seth down as Kane announced that since Ryback had taken out part of the Authority’s extended family, Big Show, he could show everyone what a true champion looked like when he went one on one with none other than Kane. We all started to walk back up the ramp, leaving Ryback to “think about what he had done”, when Seth turned around and erupted in anger.

“I am sick and tired of not getting the respect and recognition I deserve!” he shouted. “So tonight, I’m going to show everyone, when I challenge Dean *Ambrose* to a one on one.”

I refrained from rolling my eyes. Kane agreed to setting up the match. I could only imagine how happy Dean was going to be once he heard, if he wasn’t listening right now.

**********

Kane's match with Ryback was a joke. As Ryback walked out to the ring, Big Show took his revenge for the beating he had received from Ryback on Monday, then deposited him into the ring. Kane bullied the ref into starting the match, and attempted to win with an immediate pin. Ryback’s a tough guy though, and he was able to fight back, enough that Big Show felt it necessary to interfere with the match, causing a win by disqualification for Ryback.

“Damn. They're vicious,” Seth said, sitting beside me as I watched Kane and Big Show continue the beating after the bell had signaled the end of the match.

“Mmhmm. They're not kidding around, that's for sure.”

“And… you're ok with this?” he asked.

I shrugged. “Not really. But Kane is technically my superior, and I don't know Big Show *that* well…”

“You're such a goody two shoes,” Seth said with a disappointed sigh. I rolled my eyes, but my
cheeks burned with embarrassment. I was trying to be more understanding, but I couldn’t help that it still left a bad taste in my mouth.

“Well, sorry for having principles that I try to live by.” I stuck my tongue out at him.

“You’re forgiven.” He flicked my nose.

“Ow… You’re such a jerk.”

“You know it,” he said with a grin.

**********

“Hey,” Kane shouted. I was walking with him, discussing Seth's upcoming schedule for the week, when we came across Roman leaning in and making a crew member very nervous. “What the hell do you think you're doing??”

“Tell me where Bray is or get the hell out of my way, Kane,” Roman growled.

“Ro…” I said as the crewman ran off. “What happened?”

He tossed a paper at me. It was a photo from that room Bray had “decorated” on Monday. “Found this in my locker. If that’s not a message, I don’t know what is. Now. Where. Is. BRAY.”

“I don’t like your tone, Roman,” Kane said, growling a bit. “You’re a loose cannon, and I think it would be best if you took the rest of the night off. Get out of the arena. Now.”

“Kane, that’s a bit extreme--”

“No, baby girl,” Roman said, getting much too close to Kane. “You want me out? You’re going to have to force me, Kane.”


“Kane! You don’t need to--” Three security guys came in, surrounding Roman.

“Don’t touch me,” he hissed at them. “Fine. I’m gone. For now.” He left, storming out of the closest exit.

“Was that really necessary?” I asked Kane. I hadn’t even had a chance to talk to him. Kane huffed, but didn’t answer my question.

**********

I refused to go out with Seth to the ring. “No. Absolutely not. You're going up against Dean. I'm not standing against him when Roman's not here and you can't make me.”

“Dollface--”

“I said no, Rollins! If you drag me out there, I swear to the heavens that I will make a scene,” I hissed at him.

“Fine!” he said, throwing his hands up in frustration. “Be that way! But when I win, you have to give me a good luck kiss the next time I go up against one of them.”

“If by some chance I should lose then! Then I get a kiss!”

“Ugh, fine. Should you lose your match against Dean tonight, then the next time you go up against Roman or Dean, I will give you one good luck kiss. If you win, with a clean win, I will… I will go out drinking with you guys.”

“Deal.” Seth held out his hand and we shook on it.

**********

Seth had won. And it had been a clean win. Well, relatively. Dean had mucked it up a bit, trying to pull Joey into the ring to perform Dirty Deeds on him, but had ended up distracting himself and giving Seth the opportunity to put the Pedigree on him and pin him in the middle of the ring.

“I’ll let you choose the bar,” Seth said, grinning so widely that I was certain his face was going to break.

“I don’t know any bars. Honestly, when I drink, I tend to just do it in the hotel with friends. Roman and Dean, usually Rini as well, sometimes Nattie or Paige…” I shrugged, not really liking the way Seth had put me on the spot. “Maybe the hotel bar? It’s small, but I heard some of the others saying it had a good selection.”

“Whatsoever you want, dollface.” Seth hugged me and I couldn’t help by smile. “There’s my girl. You’re always better when you’re happy.”

“Who says I’m happy?” I said, scowling at him, trying to hide my emotions. “You make my life difficult, Rollins. Never forget that.” I started to walk away.

“And you love every minute of it!” he called after me with a cackle.

**********

“Can’t believe he got you to drink with us,” Joey said, sliding onto the barstool next to mine.

“I lost a bet,” I replied, tapping the glass of my drink just to hear the clink. “And…I thought I should…maybe…perhaps… be a bit more open to the team. I don’t think I’ll ever truly get along with Stephanie or Hunter, but…you guys…” I looked over at Kane, who was being flirted with by the waitress. Kane was a bit oblivious. “Well, you seem to be alright. Kane, too. Still don’t know about Jamie.”

“Still mad at him about that ‘talk’ he gave you?” Joey asked. “Can’t blame you. It’s alright to not like him. As long as we can all get along together.” The bartender came up to take Joey’s order. “So, uh, I’ve been meaning to ask…since we’re getting along and everything, are you…are you seeing anyone?”

My head shot around to him so fast, I’m surprised I didn’t break my neck. “Please tell me you’re not asking me to help you cheat on your wife…”

His eyes went wide and he laughed loudly. “Sweetheart, you’re a…well, a sweetheart, but no woman could ever be tempting enough for me to do that. No, I was thinking, if you want, we could go out sometime, as friends. Maybe next day off?” he said. “I was just worried you might have jealous boyfriend. Always good to ask these things beforehand.”

I blushed hard. So embarrassing! “No, I’m not seeing anyone. Not even casually. I would like that, but--”
“But you’re in love with someone else,” Joey finished for me, taking a sip from the drink the bartender just handed him. My jaw dropped.

“What!? No! I’m not-- I mean--”

“It’s ok, sweetheart. I get it. If I was into guys, he’d probably be my type as well.” Joey looked over at Seth. “Too bad he’s already got a girlfriend. Well, too bad for you, I mean.”

“It’s not… I don’t… We’re not like that… even if he didn’t have a girlfriend,” I said weakly.

Joey continued to watch me. “Sorry. The way you two are together… sometimes I wondered if it had been more. You don’t really seem the type, but Seth…” Joey shook his head and laughed.

“Well, if you ever just need a hookup, no strings attached, I know a few guys who’d love to meet you.”

I laughed softly. “Thanks, Joey. I don’t think I’ll ever take you up on that though. But, I would like to be friends with you.”

“Like you and Roman are? I hear I’m even better than him,” he said with a smile. I remembered how Jamie had compared Joey to Roman and smiled.

“I suppose… that wouldn’t be a bad relationship to have with you. Just note, me and Roman? Strictly platonic. He’s handsome, but I’ve seen sides of him that make it impossible to see him in a ‘sexy’ light. Same with me and Dean.”

Joey laughed loudly at that, drawing the gaze of several people. I laughed along with him. A hand clapped on both of our backs. “Good to see you two getting along,” Seth said, though his voice sounded a bit strained.

“You ok, Rollins?” I asked, putting my hand up to his forehead. “You sound like you’re coming down with something. You feel a bit warm, too.”

“I’m fine. I just-- You know, I am feeling a bit under the weather…”

“Oh, you’re coming down with something, alright,” Joey said under his breath, a smile on his face. Louder, he said, “Sweetheart, why don’t you take the champ up to his room? Tuck him in and make sure he gets his rest. Best for all of us, I think.”

“Yeah, that’s a good idea. Come on, Rollins. Upstairs with you.” Seth allowed me to push him along, though he fought me a bit when I made him take some medicine. “Such a child…”
“Darlin’.”

“Noble. Good to see you on your feet again.” I mostly meant it, if only because it meant I wouldn’t have to be sleeping, or not sleeping, in a hospital room anymore.

Seth was bouncing around like a little kid. “Dollface, you got everything ready?”

I sighed. “Yeah. Everything you asked for. Just call for it, and the stagehands will have it done.”

We walked out as a group, and once we were in the ring, Seth declared he would defeat the Beast, saying Brock was scared of him and was getting as far away as he could. It was definitely a stretch of the truth. Seth then started doling out the presents he had me arrange for. Apple Watches for the three men. A vacation to Hawaii for Kane. A brand new Cadillac for the Jays. Even Big Show was given a small token, since he was part of the extended Authority family, a five-hundred dollar gift card to his choice of store. I had spoken to him about it earlier, and he told me he would have to think about which store, but would tell me by the end of the night. I wasn't sure how seriously I should take Seth's change of heart, but I didn't question it. Mostly because I didn't want to know the answer.

“And my lovely manager,” Seth said, turning to me. I raised an eyebrow at him. “You arranged for all of this at my request, but don’t think I forgot about you. Come on, bring it in.” Seth opened his arms for a hug. I could only stare at him, so he ended up coming to me, wrapping me up in his arms. Jamie, Joey and Kane followed suit, making it a giant group hug. “We all appreciate everything you do,” Seth said, “and we all got together to figure out how to say thank you. Guys?”

“We got you a brand new tablet, along with a gift card so you can buy all the movies, tv series, and video games you want to watch on it,” Kane said as Joey handed me my new tablet, complete with a new case. It had a bright red bow on it, and heart stickers. Seth’s logo was embroidered on the case cover. When I opened the case, I saw that it was the latest, best reviewed model available.

I smiled. “You guys… You’re such… You…” I couldn’t help it, I was truly touched. I hugged each of them individually, even Jamie, though I cut his hug short when he hugged me a little too tightly. “Thank you. All of you.”

“You deserve it, dollface,” Seth whispered in my ear.

**********

“Nice to know you can be bought so easily,” Dean said. I grimaced and turned to face him.

“Dee…”

“No, no, I mean, it’s a really nice tablet. Must have set back that traitor a pretty penny. Unlike your old tablet, which me and Roman had to pool our money together for, and wasn’t considered top of the line, or even middle of the line, when we got it for you.”

I looked down at the new tablet. Then I looked at the older one. It had been with me for so long, since a few weeks after the Shield broke up. Roman and Dean gotten it for me, saying that I would be more efficient if I went digital instead of using my clipboard. They had been trying to distract
me from the depression I had fallen into. “Do you want me to get rid of it?” I asked Dean. My old one was slow, and had its issues, but I could live with it, if it would make Dean feel better. Family first, family always. “I don’t need a new tablet. I just liked that they showed me some appreciation. I work really hard and sometimes…” I sighed. “It’s just nice to get a thank you once in a while.”

“I thank you. Like all the time!” Dean hissed. I jumped back a little.

“I know! I didn’t mean-- I appreciate that. I just… I don’t really get it from them, ya know?” I bit my lip. It sounded weird, even to me. I wasn’t supposed to belong with the Authority, and I didn’t, not really, but…somewhere along the way, I started to fit in with Kane and Joey, and to a certain extent, with Jamie as well.

“So you want their appreciation??” he asked incredulously.

“No! I mean, yes? Kind of… I don’t want to be taken for granted, that’s all. Dean, tell me to throw this out, and I will. Well, I’ll give it to someone who can use it, since I would hate to waste it, but you get what I mean.”

“You’re going to toss aside my gift?” Seth asked, appearing out of nowhere and startling the crap out of me.

“Jeez, Rollins, skulk much?” I placed my hand over my heart, trying to calm my now racing pulse. “Look, I appreciate the gesture, but…” I looked over at Dean. “My current one is still usable and-“

“Bullshit! You’re being bullied by your own brother into giving up something nice just because it came from me.” Seth’s words were for me, but he was glaring at Dean. “If someone else, like Roman or…or Natalya had given it to you, he wouldn’t be telling you to give it up, he’d be begging you to let him play with it. Don’t you roll your eyes at me, Ambrose, you know I’m right!”

“Fiiiiiiine. But she doesn’t need your bribes, Seth. I’m not done with you just yet. I may not be able to take it from you right now or in the immediate future, but your time with Y/N will come to a close. Now, I gotta go find Roman, get ready for our match. See you in the ring later.” Dean kissed my cheek, but he kept his stare on Seth as he did so.

Once he was gone, Seth took the new tablet from me. “If you’re just going to trash it, I’ll return it,” he said. “But you’re keeping the damn gift card.”

“I was going to give the tablet away, actually. Seemed like a waste to just toss it out.” I bit my bottom lip. “I really do appreciate the gesture, Seth. I just… It’s difficult, balancing my work life with my family life, considering how at odds you guys are with each other.”

“I know, dollface, I know. And I get it.” He tucked the tablet under his arm, then held his other hand out. “Give me your tablet.”

“Why?” I was suddenly suspicious.

“Just… trust me. I’m not going to damage it.” I rolled my eyes and handed it to him. He looked at it, then tucked it in with the new tablet. “Thanks. Just gonna borrow it for a bit, I swear it’s not to break it. I’ll see you before the match, dollface?”

“Of course. Don’t call me dollface.”

**********
“Guys, knock it off,” I said, half meaning it. Jamie and Joey were honking the horn of their new car as Kane and Seth walked down the ramp.

“You want a ride later, sweetheart?” Joey asked me, giving me a wink.

I laughed. Joey and I had gotten much more comfortable around each other, and while it wasn’t the same level I had with Roman or Dean, it was nice in a strange sort of way.

“Hey! No chicks in the new car!” Jamie exclaimed, hugging the car protectively.

“Don’t worry, Noble. Joey’s just joking around. Come on, the match is about to start.” I wasn’t staying at ring side, but I wanted to at least see Roman and Dean. I found myself being pulled into a hug by Roman once I got to the ring.

“You being pulled to the dark side, baby girl?” he whispered in my ear. Seth was frowning at us, but I ignored him.

“Of course not. I’m just getting along with my coworkers. Well, some of them. But, I could really use some brother time tonight. I feel like I haven’t seen you guys in a while.” Roman let go of me.

“Pizza and beer, we’re sharing a room tonight. You got that?” he said, pushing me towards the ramp. “And stay out of this tonight. No matter what happens.”

I nodded, my heart dropping down to my stomach. In all the team bonding from the past week, I had forgotten something very important. My brothers were still at odds with Seth and the United Authority. “Ok… Roman?” He looked at me questioningly. “Be careful.”

“Always, baby girl.”

**********

I had to stop watching not long after the bell was rung to signify Seth’s win on Dean. Like they dismantled Brock last week, the United Authority was now dismantling my brothers. Roman would be angry with me if I put myself in danger, but I was hard pressed to stay backstage. Bray Wyatt had interfered in the match, taking out Roman just when he had been about to take out the Authority, handing the win to Seth and Kane. “Please be safe… Please be safe…” I whispered as they beat him down. Seth stopped at the beginning of what looked like a vicious beating, whispered something to Roman, and then led the others away, victorious. Roman was still moving, coughing as he gasped for breath. He’s ok!

Then I saw Bray heading back to the ring. No! I took off at a run, but before I could get out there, I was caught by Kane.

“Leave him, Y/N. You can't do anything except get hurt.”

“Let. Me, GO!” I shoved as hard as I could. I can only assume Kane was so surprised by my reaction that he let go. I was off and running again, someone's footsteps were behind me, but my panic had me running faster than I ever had before. I'm not particularly strong, but if there's any athletic ability in me, it's running. I grabbed a kendo stick as I ran through gorilla and continued down the ramp.

Please let me be in time! I thought, sailing into the ring just mere seconds after Bray hit Roman with the Sister Abigail. He saw me and ducked out of the way, rolling out of the ring before I could hit him. His laughter taunted me as he circled the ring, his eyes glued to me.
“Such familial love,” he cried. “Reminds me of my own dear sister, how she loved to watch over me, care for me… but she was gone too soon… Take care of your brothers, lovely Y/N, for you may not have them much longer.” Bray spread his arms out and looked to the heavens. “Follow! The buzzards…” He laughed again and left, leaving Roman and me to our own devices.

**********

“Y/N,” Kane said from behind me. I had gotten Roman and Dean to medical, and they were looking both of them over.

“Yes?” I asked quietly.

“You can't interfere with Bray and Roman. The Authority--”

“Fuck the Authority!” I hissed. “You think I'm going to stand by and watch Bray Wyatt prey on my brother?! Think again!”

“Y/N--”

“No! He is my blood! I would die for him, and more importantly, I would kill for him. I like you, Kane, but if you say one more word against him, I will make you wish you were in hell with the rest of the demons because they would be a balm compared to me!” I snarled. Kane actually took a step back. I took a deep breath to calm myself. “You won't let anyone speak of your family, yes?” He nodded. “Consider that the same for me.”

**********

“As entertaining as it was to see you make Kane cower, he has a point,” Dean said. After Kane had left, I had been allowed to come see him and Roman. Roman was asleep, so it was just Dean and me. “You can't put yourself in danger like that. Roman wouldn't want that.”

“I'm a grown adult, Dean. I can do what I please.” I was holding Roman's hand, tracing the tattoos on his wrist with my fingers. The turtle he had inked for his daughter was exposed, normally covered by his gauntlet, and I hummed the lullaby JoJo loved most.

“Then, I am asking you, for Roman's sake as well as your own, don't get involved. It may be too late, but the less targets Bray has, the better Roman can deal with him. JoJo and his wife are safe in Florida, but you and me...we're here. I can take care of myself. You...not so much. I know you'd try, but do you really think you could take on Bray Wyatt? Or that Justin Bieber and the Hobbits can?”

I opened my mouth to protest, but closed it again. Grumbling, I said, “No, I can't. Rollins and the Jays...maybe, but I can't ask them for help in this. Ok, fine. I won't… I won't put myself in danger, but I will help where I can.” I was going to stubborn about that one.

“You get hurt, and I'll kick your ass myself,” Roman muttered, his eyes still closed. “Stay close to Seth. If I need your help, I'll tell you, but not one second before, you got that?” He opened one eye to look at me, sending a chill down my spine.

“Yes, Roman,” I whispered. Behind me, I heard Dean mutter, Told ya so.

**********

An intern handed me a package before I left the arena that night. Roman and the others were going to join me later, so I didn’t open it until I was alone in my hotel room, but when I did, I found it
contained my tablet, bound in the new cover Seth had gotten me. A note was taped to it.

*Dollface, you deserve way better than this, but I don’t need any extra tension between you and Dean, for my own reasons. I had the intern take it to get fixed up, new components to make it work faster, better, and increased the storage capacity. He shouldn’t be able to tell the difference.--Seth*

I couldn’t stop the smile that spread across my face. He really did care, in his own selfish way. One step forward.

^v^v^v^v^v

**Smackdown - July 2, 2015**

Seth, the Jays, and I started off Smackdown. Kane wasn't due back from his vacation for a while, but Seth was happy to convey messages from Kane. Kane wisely sent me the messages to give to Seth, so that I could know if Seth was being an ass about something or not. Like Dean going up against Bray in a match just when Dean came out with a kendo stick to kick Seth's butt. If I hadn't seen the text with my own eyes, I would probably have assumed Seth did it on his own.

Sadly, Bray won that match, then knelt down to whisper something in Dean's ear before he kissed his forehead and left the ring.

When he got to the top of the ramp, he turned to the crowd, but it was Roman he was really speaking to. He promised to burn everything Roman loves to the ground and to end him last, as a mercy. “Anyone but you, Roman. Anyone. But. You… Run.”

*So creepy.*

**********

The Jays were playing with their new Apple watches, showing off to Seth and joking about how Roman won't be showing up for his match with Seth later because he was too injured.

“He'll be here,” I said, flipping through a magazine.

“Bullpoop.”

I looked up at Jamie. “You kiss your momma with that mouth?” I asked him.

He made a face. “I'm just sayin’, no way he's gonna be here, since Bray took him out less than a week ago.”

“That? Please, that was nothing.”

“You freaked out over nothing?” Jamie asked.

“Ok, maybe it wasn’t nothing, but it’ll take a lot more than that to keep Roman out of the ring,” I said with a sigh. “I know they can handle it, I just...I let my emotions get away from me.” I shrugged. “When it comes to my family, I am not to be taken lightly.” I was still flipping through the magazine. “So trust me when I say, as long as he can walk, Roman will be here.”

Joey and Jamie voiced their doubts, but Seth didn’t say anything.

**********

Rusev and Summer Rae announced their relationship, and I honestly couldn’t muster up any
interest in it. It was obvious that Rusev was doing it to get back at Lana, who had recently announced she and Dolph were officially an item.

I sighed. “What is this business coming to…”

“It is to the dogs, as they say,” Lana chimed in as she and Dolph walked by.

Seth and the Jays went out to the ring, leaving me in the private locker room by myself. I watched the little monitor as they began to count down to Roman being counted out at a loss, but Roman showed up at the last minute. “Told you so, Rollins,” I said to Seth. He glanced at the camera, almost like he heard me. I wouldn’t be surprised if he had heard me say it in his head. I did love telling him that.

Roman still looked injured, and Seth took advantage of that fact. Roman didn’t seem to care how much pain he was in, he kept attacking Seth even though it was obvious he was hurting himself too. The Jays interfered right when Roman was about to deliver a Superman Punch, ending the match in a win by disqualification for Roman. Seth joined in, but thankfully, Dean ran out there with a kendo stick to even up the odds. Poor Joey got caught by them when he, Jamie and Seth tried to escape into the crowd. After Roman and Dean pulled him back into the ring, he was rewarded with a Dirty Deeds, a Superman Punch, a Running Bulldog, and finally, a Spear. Joey was finally able to roll out of the ring after that, leaving Roman and Dean standing victorious.

“Dollface, you busy tonight?” Seth asked me as we packed up everything to leave the arena.

“Not really. I was going to watch a movie with Roman, but there was a change of plans.” He had held his head high, but he had been hurting when he came backstage. I had insisted that if he wouldn’t allow me to take him to get checked out, that Dean should take him instead. Not that I wanted to let Seth know that.

“Oh, well, the guys and I were going to go out, but Joey… He and Jamie are just going to go chill out at the hotel.”

“I can imagine.” I turned to pick up my things.

“So I was thinking we could hang out,” Seth said in a rush.

I turned back to face him. “Hang out? Like, just you and me?”

“Yeah, I mean, it’s been a while, and we can watch a movie, or play some video games…”

“You want to play Madden, don’t you?” I said, giving him a look.

“Well, I mean, if you want to,” he said with a grin. “Woods did say we’re having another Madden tournament this year. His YouTube channel is doing well and I could always use the practice--”

“Playing against me isn’t going to do you any good and you know it. If we’re playing a game, it should be something that’s either co-op, or that we have equal experience playing.” I shoved my finger into his chest. “You’re buying dinner, and you have to be in bed by midnight. You have an early morning signing tomorrow, and if you want to get your workout in, there’s a limited time window-- OW!” Seth had flicked my nose.
“I accept your conditions, we can play some old school Street Fighter. Woods lent it to me a few weeks ago, but I haven’t had a chance to play yet.”

“Jerk…” I rubbed the tip of my nose. “It’s on.”
Death of a Cadillac

Raw - July 6, 2015

“Brock's here,” I told Seth. He was in the Authority's executive lounge, chatting on the phone with the Jays, who were touring Chicago at the moment. Kane was still on his vacation and had sent me photos. It was really funny to see him doing all the tourist things, but he seemed to be having fun. I kept my eye on the clock. That stupid rule was still in effect. “Might want to listen to what Heyman’s going to say for him.” I turned to leave.

“Hey,” Seth said, grabbing my wrist, “stay. You never hang out here. And since Kane and J&J are not here…”

I sighed. It was as I had suspected. Seth had no idea about the rule Stephanie had set for me. “I can't. I'm not allowed to stay in here for more than a few minutes. Smiley will drag me out of here in…” I consulted my watch. “In three minutes.”

“Wh-what? Seriously?”

“Yeah. Stephanie doesn't trust me to not distract you or whatever.” I shrugged. “It's not a big deal. Too cold in here anyway.”

“But--”

“Look, Rollins, don't rock the boat about this. You got what you wanted, your ‘family’ is back together, and ‘mom and dad’ are moderately happy with you.”

“So you're just going to let them treat you like this?!?”

I sighed again. “It's not worth the hassle. I would hardly spend any time in here anyway, so I have chosen to not pick this battle.”

Seth looked disgruntled. “Still…”

“I have to go, make sure you watch Paul and Brock, ok?”

“Fine…”

**********

Seth ended up following me to the monitor outside the makeup area, claiming he needed my opinions on his opponent and if he had to leave the lounge, then so be it.

“You're an idiot.” He glared at me, but plopped down in the chair next to me. I couldn't help but smile and squeezed his hand. “Thanks.”

“Don't know what you're talking about. Can you be quiet? I'm trying to listen to the windbag.” I punched him lightly and that got him to smile. At least until Paul started talking. “He’s not a god of love or family?? He’s a god of violent retribution?! Seriously?? Lesner isn’t a god at all!” Seth seethed.

“Hmmm… Paul isn’t winning any points mentioning Undertaker’s broken streak. Oh, for crying out loud, the ‘eleventh commandment’? ‘Thou shalt not provoke the Beast’,” I mocked. “You
couldn’t obey that if you tried.”

“Hey!”

“It’s true.” I looked over at him. He opened his mouth to protest, then shut it and grumbled about me having a smart mouth. “Jeez, Paul is really pushing this ‘god’ analogy.”

“He’s not a god…”

“No shit, Rollins. He’s just an overmuscled jerk with a blowhard for a mouthpiece. And he’s trolling for you. You better have a plan for tonight, considering Kane is in Hawaii and we don’t know when the Jays will get here.”

“Ugh… I hate this…but, yeah, I’ve got a plan.”

“Better not involve hiding. Just going to make Brock madder.”

He was silent for a few moments, then said, “Ok, I have another plan.”

**********

Seth kept a lookout while I continued to watch the monitor. Paige was having trouble with the Bellas, and then later, Roman was distracted by Bray Wyatt in his match. Both of them suffered losses in their matches due to outside interference. I could only shake my head and hope things turned around for them.

“Jamie! Joey! Glad you two could make it,” I heard Seth say as we were walking towards Hunter’s office. I turned to see the two men walking up to us from a side corridor.

“Have a good time discovering Chicago?” I asked them.

“Oh, yeah, a blast. Gotta come back again and really take some time to just...be here,” Jamie said with a bit of awe in his voice.

“Hey, why don’t you guys walk with us, tell us about what you saw? We’re just going over to see Hunter.” Jamie and Joey loved the idea and launched into a very detailed telling of their adventures.

**********

I stood outside Hunter’s office, waiting for Seth. Hunter wanted to speak to him alone, and while the Jays had taken off to catering, I was listening intently to what they were discussing. And I was terrified.

As soon as Seth came out of the office, I was on him. “You cannot be serious!”

He took a step back, surprised by how in his face I was. “I don’t know what--”

I grabbed his ear and pulled him down to my level. “Intentionally provoking the Beast?! Does that ring any bells? I just heard you and Hunter talking about it!”

“Ow… but it’s perfect! No one will ever suspect it.”

“Because it’s suicide!” I exclaimed.

“It’s not, I swear. I have a plan,” he said calmly, pulling my hand away from his ear.
“You better, Rollins. I am not cleaning up a murder scene.”

**********

I held Lana as Dolph was taken out on a stretcher. I was missing Dean’s match against Bo Dallas, but he had seen me with Lana, and I knew he would understand. “He’s going to be ok,” I was whispering to her as she cried softly. “We’ve got great doctors, and he’s going to get top notch care…”

“How cood Rusev doooo this?” she wailed. “‘E has ‘is new trophy. Why… Why Dolf?”

“I don’t know, Lana…” Except I did. Rusev was a possessive asshole, and if he couldn’t have Lana, he didn’t want anyone else to have her either. “Do you want me to take you to the hospital or do you want to accompany Dolph in the ambulance?”

“Am-buu-lance. I vill get cab later.”

**********

“I still say this is a Bad Idea,” I told Seth as we waited in gorilla. He was holding an axe handle in his hands, the dangerous blade of it having been removed. Jamie and Joey had ones as well, but they had decided to drive the car out to the stage and were not with us at the moment.

“You're just scared.”

“Of course I'm scared! Brock Lesner is a very scary man!”

“And I'm not?” He gave me a look.

I cast my eyes down. “Not to me… I just… I worry about you, you jerk.”

He looped his arm over me and pulled me in for a hug. “I got this, dollface. Trust me? You believe in me, don't you?”

I sighed. “Yes…” I kissed his cheek to show him I meant it. “Just please be careful.”

“I'm about to provoke Brock Lesner. I think that ship has sailed.”

I could only sigh again and pray to anyone that was listening to keep these men safe. When Seth walked out to the ring, I went with him, but sat next to Byron Saxton at the commentary table. Jamie and Joey drove their new car out to meet Seth at ringside.

“Y/N, nice to have you here with us,” Byron said, handing me a headset. JBL and Michael Cole gave me similar greetings.

“Nice to be here. Lovely night to call out a Beast, right?” I said with a smile. I would be strong for Seth's sake. He had a plan. I could only trust he knew what he was doing.

“Bit insane is what this is,” JBL said. “What is that boy thinking??”

“He's thinking of the big picture,” I said. “Rollins has to stay five steps ahead of Brock, and it's a narrow path he walks.”

Seth had begun to talk to the crowd, reminding them of how he had conquered the Beast in the previous weeks and making promises to burn Suplex City to the ground. The crowd started to taunt Seth, chanting Justin Bieber at him. He ignored them, instead addressing Brock Lesner as Paul
Heyman’s bitch.

“Oh, he did not just call Brock that,” Michael said.

“He did,” I said. “It may not make sense, but Rollins knows exactly what he's doing.” Michael and JBL continued to exchange remarks as Brock's music hit and he walked out. He only made it as far as the end of the aisle that lead to the ring. Watching Seth and the Jays dare him to enter the ring, he reconsidered and began to back away, never taking his eyes off them.

“Odd,” Byron said. “Didn't think he would back away from this challenge.”

“Brock knows when he's beat,” JBL said. “Even he's not about to enter a ring with three men holding weapons like that!”

“Not so sure about that,” Byron said, but JBL mocked him.

“I have to agree with Byron,” I piped up. “Something's not right. Look at Brock's eyes. He's not scared.”

We all watched as he backed up to the edge of the ramp, JBL’s voice in our ears, telling us we were crazy to think Brock wasn't scared. Then he motioned for something off to the side. A few seconds later, Paul was wheeling one of the emergency fire kits to Brock. Opening the large box, Brock drew out not one, but two axes, both with the axe heads still attached to them, unlike Seth's, Jamie’s, or Joey’s.

“He looks like Paul Bunyan!” JBL exclaimed.

Seth was shouting at Brock about being unfair, which was absurd, considering everything, but even I was surprised when Brock turned and began assaulting the Jays car, single handedly destroying the car as Seth and the Jays could only stand in the ring and watch helplessly. This was clearly not something Seth had anticipated. Joey and Jamie ran out of the ring to meet Brock, but he destroyed them much like he did the car. He went after Seth next, who hit Brock with the axe handle enough to knock him off balance so that he could escape into the crowd.

“A minor setback,” I told the commentary team. I must have faith. “This doesn't change a thing. Seth will retain his championship at Battleground. You have my word on that.”

“And this...running away?” Michael asked.

I have them a practiced smile. “Strategic retreat. He's toying with Brock, giving him a false sense of superiority.” I could only hope that was true. “Now, if you will excuse me, I must see to my associates.” I removed the headset, grabbed Seth's championship title, and hurried over to the Jays, avoiding Brock's gaze. I helped Joey while a stagehand helped Jamie to medical.

**********

“I'm guessing things didn't go as planned?” I asked Seth.

“Not...exactly,” he mumbled. The Jays were taken to the local hospital and I had met Seth in the parking lot of the arena. “Can't believe he destroyed the car…”

“In hindsight, it was kind of obvious, but I'll work with the insurance and figure something out, ok?” He nodded. “So what's next? Plan B?” I hated asking about it. Almost as much as I hated the concept of Plan B. Damn Hunter…
“That was actually a secondary plan,” Seth said. “My primary plan is still in the works. Not sure if it will pan out, but… gotta try.”

“This is insane. I feel like whatever your plan is, it’s a long shot and it’s got a very low percentage of actually working.”

“What makes you say that?” Seth asked, handing me his bag.

“Because you refuse to talk about it.”

He looked at me, a little stunned. “Well, guess you got me there. But if it works…” He grinned. “Come on, dinner’s on me. There’s this great place Cesaro told me about that’s on the way to the hotel.”

"Ok, but don't forget you have an appearance on Tough Enough tomorrow, so no staying out late!”

"Yes, mom," he said, rolling his eyes, but still smiling.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - July 9, 2015

“I feel sick…” Seth said. He did look a bit pale. He was sitting next to me and I put my forehead to his. He felt clammy. That worried me. Normally he ran a bit hot to the touch.

“You think you can make it through the intro? You requested time to address the WWE Universe at the beginning of the show,” I reminded him gently.

He leaned on my shoulder. “Maybe? Yeah, I think so.”

“Ok. You're on in a few. I'll go down to medical and grab something for you to take. Pepto or Mylanta…”

“Gross…”

I smacked him. “You'll take it like a man or I'm going to tell everyone ‘Sethie has a wittle tummy ache.’ How quickly do you think you'll get jumped after that?”

“You're evil,” he growled, still using my shoulder as a pillow.

“I learned from the best,” I replied sweetly.

**********

I watched in gorilla as Seth recapped his actions from Monday, talking angrily about how Brock messed with his family, the Jays. Jamie and Joey were out of the hospital but had been sent home for bed rest.

A beeping interrupted Seth, drawing everyone's attention to the tow truck that was backing into the arena, carrying the scrapped car that Brock had destroyed. “Who the hell let that in?” I demanded, yelling at an intern. “Get it out of here, right now!”

“I think not, my dear,” Paul said behind me. He picked up a microphone. “If you will excuse me…” He left the gorilla position and I watched on the monitor as he stood on stage and talked to the crowd, as well as Seth, about how this could be a metaphor for Seth being alone come Battleground.
“Metaphors, my ass,” I mumbled. “Seth is not alone and he knows it, Paul.” It didn't matter if the Jays, or Kane were there or not. He still had them, and me, for moral support.

Paul went on about how Seth would suffer more than the car did at Brock's hands, but Seth started screaming at Paul to shut up. He was tired of hearing Paul’s claims, which I had to agree were annoying, and said as much. Well, yelled as much. He declared Brock would regret tangling with him, and I could only hope Seth could back up that claim with his “secret” plan.

**********

Dean's rematch with Bo Dallas was actually quite entertaining. Bo, despite being a bit of a joke with his “Bo-lieve!” messages, was a decent wrestler when he got serious. Unfortunately, like on Raw, Bo was beaten by Dean.

“Can't believe it took that long,” Dean said once he was backstage with me.

“Don't you mean you can't bo-lieve?” I asked with a grin.

“Jerk,” Dean said, but he was laughing.

**********

“You sure you feel ok?” I asked Seth, checking his forehead again, with my hand this time.

“Yeah, I'm fine,” he insisted, but he still felt cold to the touch.

“Hey, if pretty girl is fretting over you, you let her fret,” Big Show said, entering the lounge.

“She's worried over nothing,” Seth said, then let out a nasty smelling belch. “Oh, crap, that tasted awful…” he muttered.

“Right, I just came to check on you. What with J and J being out, Kane away on his vacation, Triple H and Stephanie out on business…” Big Show looked between Seth and me. “And no offense, but Y/N isn't really good for back up…”

“None taken,” I said with a shrug. “I know my strengths and weaknesses.”

“Yeah, I'm not worried. At all.” Seth managed to not look too worried.

“Seth,” I said gently, “if you are too sick to wrestle tonight, that's fine. We can reschedule it for next week.”

“No, no, I said I'm fine! I've just… I got a lot on my mind with Battleground right around the corner, that's all. Not that I don't have it in the bag, of course… Though, uh, Big Show, I know you've had some beef with Lesner before, and if you want to help burn Suplex City to the ground…”

Big Show laughed. “Nah, bro, that's your mission. I'm just here to make sure you're focused on Ryback tonight.”

“Oh, yeah, of course. Pssh, I've got Ryback in the bag! I'm going to make an example of him, show him who the Champ is, soften him up for your upcoming match with him.”

“Yeah, yeah! There you go! You do that, you show him who the champ is! Make an example of him. You know what? While you're showing everyone who the man is, who the champ is, I'll take care of your old buddy tonight. One on one with Roman Reigns.” Big Show laughed, along with
Seth, then saw me glaring at him. “Uh, well, you know, within...reason?”

“It’s fine,” I said. “Do what you feel is best.” I would just need to let Roman know Big Show might be “repaying” Seth for taking out Ryback.

**********

“Nonononono!” I screamed at the monitor, grabbing the edges of it. Seth nearly jumped a mile out of his seat. He had been resting on the couch not far from me.

He peered over my shoulder. “What happened? Did Show-- Oh. Damn…”

Bray Wyatt had appeared during Roman's match with Big Show, and while Roman had been momentarily distracted, it hadn't been enough to cost him the match. Bray had then interfered again, dragging Roman in the ring post crotch first and causing him to win by disqualification. Big Show had been too out of it to notice and kept going, choke slamming Roman into the mat and attempting to pin him. Once he did realize, he left the ring in a huff, but also leaving Roman to Bray’s mercy.

“I have to go…” I muttered, pushing past Seth. He caught my wrist.

“You are not going out there,” he said. “I heard about what Roman told you, and I hate agreeing with him, but I can't let you--”

“I'm not going out there,” I said quietly. “But I am going to meet him in medical. That shouldn't be a problem, right?”

He didn't let go of my wrist. “Yeah, should be fine. Will you still go out to the ring with me?”

“I don't know yet.”

**********

“I'm fine, baby girl.” Roman gave me a smile, trying to cover up the fact that he was holding his arm strangely.

“You sure? I can take you to the hospital…”

“I just need some ice, that's all. Peaches, tell her.”

Peaches nodded at me.

“Fine. I want you to prove it to me with a hug. Big hug. Squishy hug,” I demanded. Roman laughed and gave me a great big bear hug. I hummed happily. “I guess you’ll be ok, if you can manage this.”

“You're such a little kid,” he said, a soft note in his voice.

**********

“A champion doesn't run. A champion doesn't hide. I told Seth what it takes to be a champion and tonight... Tonight I'm going to show him,” Ryback said, his voice rumbling with anger.

I turned off the sound on the monitor and turned to Seth. He was looking pale again. “Are you sure you want to go through with this match? I can still reschedul--”
“No, I got this,” he growled. “If that asshole thinks I'm going to let him talk to me like that, he's got another thing coming.”

I rolled my eyes. “Rollins, if you're sick and still wrestle…” He shook his head.

“Just give me an extra kiss of good luck and everything will work itself out.”

“I'm going to regret this, but fine.” I kissed one cheek, then the other, his beard tickling my skin a little. “You start going downhill at any time, and I'm stopping the match.”

“Fine, fine.”

**********

Ryback walked out first, then Seth and I. I gave him a nod, though Seth kept looking at the recycled car that was still sitting next to the stage. He was seething about it. “Use it in the ring, Rollins. Don’t get distracted.”

He grunted in response. Not a good sign.

The match started, but Seth wasn’t doing well. He kept trying to meet Ryback head on, but his movements were stiff, as if he was holding back, trying to contain himself. It was strange. Then Ryback caught Seth and held him upside down for nearly a minute. I wasn’t sure, but I thought I saw Seth turn red from the blood rushing to his head, and then a bit green.

Seth was able to hold his own for a bit, then Ryback took back control of the match with a neckbreaker maneuver. He threw Seth across the ring, and though Seth was able to roll through and get to his feet, Ryback caught him with a nasty clothesline. The ref was checking on him, and I ran to the side of the ring closest to him.

“Seth! Let me call this off! You look like you’re about to puke!”

“No… I got this… Even if my lunch is threatening to come back up…” He got to his feet, wobbly. “Oh, crap…”

Ryback hefted Seth up like it was nothing, and twirled him around a little, preparing for his signature move, Shell Shock. Seth was really green at that point, and he was scrambling, trying to escape Ryback’s hold. He slid down his back without his usual grace, and tried to get out of the ring, but Ryback pulled him back in by the legs, popping Seth up to a standing position, his shin guard popping off as well. Seth delivered a jumping kick to the side of Ryback’s head, which knocked the Big Guy down. I was trying to get the ref’s attention and call of the match, but he was too focused on the wrestlers. Seth rolled out of the ring and headed over to the timekeeper’s area to grab his championship belt. I was at his side in a flash.

“Can I call it off now?!” I asked him, my voice dripping with sarcasm.

“For the love of everything, yes!” he exclaimed, burping another noxious gas cloud. At least I hope that was a burp. “Oh, fuck…”

I turned to the ring to inform the ref, but Ryback was right there. He picked me up and set me aside. “Wait, Ryback! Don’t! Seth’s ill--”

He wasn’t listening to me. Seth was picked up again and hurled into the barricade. He managed to get to his feet and he tried to escape over it, but Ryback got his hands on him again. One Shell Shock, a German suplex, and a hair drag later, and Ryback was hurling Seth back into the ring.
“Finish it!” Ryback yelled, looking for another Shell Shock, but Seth managed to get out of his clutches and ran, hopping over the barricade and escaping into the crowd.

I jumped onto the apron of the ring, yelling at the ref. “Call it off! He’s unable to compete!”

The ref signaled for the bell, just as Ryback got in my face. “What you mean he’s unable to compete?! He’s a coward and is trying to take the easy way out!”

“No! He’s ill! I can reschedule the match! But right now—”

Big Show’s music hit the speakers, and both Ryback and I turned towards the entrance. Big Show was walking out, and encouraging Seth, who had found his way to the ramp, to come back to the ring with him. “See?” Ryback spat at me. “A coward.”

“No! He’s not… Let me handle this, ok?” I jumped down before he could agree and went over to Seth and Big Show, picking up Seth’s championship belt off the floor as I went. “Guys! Seriously, this is not the time—”

“You have no say over what I do to him,” Big Show said, pointing at Ryback. “I like you, Y/N, but this is between me and the IC champion. Seth is just lending me a hand.”

“Rollins…” I pleaded. He looked over at Big Show. I leaned in close to him. “Please, you’re ill,” I said softly. “You shouldn’t be doing this…”

Seth looked at me hard. I could see the sweat glistening off his skin, but he was colder than he should have been after a match. “I can’t… I can’t not help him, dollface.” Was he really that scared of being alone against Lesner that he would push his body when he was sick? Anything for a favor later on?

“Seth…please don’t…” I said, but he pushed past me and joined Big Show. The two went on opposite ends of the ring, Ryback in the middle, and simultaneously went after him. Dully, I noticed that they worked rather well together. Big Show was stomping on Ryback while Seth was holding him down, when Roman’s music blared. Seth jumped away, looking everywhere for Roman, but Big Show kept stomping.

I felt a whoosh of air as Roman ran past me down the ramp and slid into the ring under the bottom ropes. He went to town on Seth, who rolled out of the ring at the first chance he got, and then speared Big Show. Seth got back in and tried to help, but he only got a big hand to the face, then he was fed to Ryback, who Shell Shocked him one more time. Seth fell out of the ring as Roman and Ryback celebrated their victory.

Calmly, I waited for Seth. “Do you need a hand?” I asked, glancing past him and over at Roman. He shook his head. Big Show walked past us, disappointed in how things turned out.

“Not in front of the crowd…” he said, his voice tight. I nodded and followed him out, carrying the championship in my arms. Once we were backstage, he nearly collapsed on me, and I struggled to get him to medical.

**********

“Food poisoning?! You have food poisoning?!” I smacked Seth hard on his arm after the nurse took out the IV.

“Ow… that hurt, dollface… It’s not like I knew. I thought it was just indigestion… you know, that it’d go away soon enough…”
“You thought… oh my god… I’m a manager to an idiot… If the pepto I gave you wasn’t working, you should have told me!!” I smacked his arm again. He winced and then had the gall to give me puppy dog eyes. The fool even whimpered a little. “Don’t even try it, Rollins. I am seriously pissed at you right now.”

The nurse, a local who worked with the arena, chuckled. “Your boyfriend is lucky, his symptoms aren’t too severe. He’ll be fine in a day or so, just make sure he gets plenty of fluids, keeps hydrated. I can get him a prescription for some heavy duty hydration liquids, but he should be fine with the store bought stuff as well. Gatorade, Powerade, that sort of thing. Pedialyte if he’s being particularly stubborn.”

“Thank you, but we’ll stick with the store bought stuff,” I said, glaring at Seth. He had the decency to look sheepish. “And you're banned from video games for a week.”

“Damnit!”

**********

“Kiddo, pass the salt.”

“Dee,” I said, passing the salt to him. “I'm worried.”

“About the potato salad? Not surprised. You're definitely not a great coo--”

“We've been talking about Roman,” I said, glaring at him.

We were at Dean's place for a few days off. I had confiscated all of Seth's video game stuff and told him if he broke his punishment and played, I would find out and I would make it twice as bad. He seemed to be adhering to it, but insisted that I join him as soon as I could, after I had some time with my brothers.

Dean and I were in his kitchen, while Roman was outside, tending to the barbecue pit with Renee. He wasn't allowed to actually cook the steaks, but monitoring the coals was something he could do. “I am a decent cook, thank you very much. Is this enough for the potato salad or should I use more?”

Dean looked into the bowl I had been depositing the potatoes into. “Eh, chop up another two. So why are you worried about Roman?”

“This thing with Bray… He's maybe getting into Roman's head, but he's definitely getting under his skin. I'm afraid of what he'll do when he's had enough.”

“Ah, well. You're not supposed to--”

“I KNOW,” I said, rolling my eyes. “I'm not getting involved, now am I?” I huffed a bit. “I'm just saying… I'm worried…”

“I know, kiddo. You worry waaaaaaay too much. Roman’ll be fine. He's got me. And you.” He got a thoughtful look on his face. “He's got you from a distance. A long distance. So far of a distance, I'm not sure if that's you or a speck of dust.”

“You jerk. I am going to add spite as the secret ingredient to the potato salad.”

“Yeeeesss, even better than adding love. Makes it spicy,” he said with a grin. I flung a potato piece at him.
"Stephanie! How can you let Paul and Brock just continue to taunt Seth with that crushed Cadillac?" I asked, pointing at the screen. The Beast and his advocate were currently in the ring, and said advocate running his mouth as usual.

"It’s not taunting," she said, thumbing through her phone. "It’s incentive. The only way this ends is if he defeats Brock, and retains the championship." She looked up at the screen. "Though, I do admit it is an eyesore. Tell you what. Let me think about it, and if Hunter agrees, we’ll tell Paul he can’t bring it to Smackdown on Thursday. K?" She did the cute, mocking thing when she wrinkled her nose on “K” and smiled at me. “Now, get the hell out of my office.”

I clenched my jaw, biting back words, and left.

**********

"Kane! You’re back!” I said, giving him a welcoming hug. “How was Hawaii?"

"Hot. Expensive. Fun though." He grinned at me. “Where’s Se--"

"You two!” Seth yelled. We turned to see him walking angrily towards us. “I need to go shut up a Beast. You coming or not?"

I rolled my eyes, Kane shrugged his shoulders, and we followed Seth out to the ramp. He stalked over to the crushed car, then glared over to Brock in the ring.

"You’re reeeaaaalll proud of yourself, aren’t you, Lesner?” Seth growled into the microphone. I could see Brock’s grin from where I stood, it was so big. Paul, too. I wanted to slap both of them. “Well, good. I hope you are happy! Smile all you want, Beast. Because come Sunday, I am going to wipe the floor with you! And then we’ll see if you’re still smiling then.” Brock just smiled more broadly, and I thought Seth might leap over the crushed car and run to the ring right then and there.

I touched Seth’s arm. “Calm,” I said softly. “Don’t let him rile you up. That’s what he wants, what they both want. Give in to them now, and you might as well just hand that championship to him.”

He glared at me, but he did calm down enough to say, “Last week, I gave you every chance to fight me like a man, and you chose to be a coward. All that aggression, and you chose to take it out on an inanimate object. And not just an animate… an innamate…” Seth was tripping over his words so badly, it was the only way you could tell how angry he truly was. It was incredibly cute. The crowd did not agree, and started chanting Justin Bieber at him.

He regained control of his tongue, and vowed to burn Suplex City to the ground.

“We don’t have to wait until Sunday,” Brock said, taking the microphone from Paul. “I can take you to Suplex City tonight, bitch.”

Hahahaha...no. No way that's going to happen. Kane agreed with me, thankfully.

“As director of operations, I cannot allow you to harm Seth before your match. There will be a contract signing at the end of the night,” Seth’s head swiveled so hard I thought it might pop off, “and if Brock lays a hand on the champion--"
Paul interrupted with laughter. “I'm sorry, are you... are you threatening my client? This man here?” He pointed to all of Brock. “Is the baby brother to the Undertaker threatening Brock Lesner??”

I took a step toward Kane, placing myself as an obstacle in his path. “Kane, calm down,” I said softly. I heard him growl behind me.

“Oh... Oh, dear... Did I upset you?” Paul asked, mocking Kane. “Because I mentioned your brother, the Undertaker? The man my client battled at Wrestlemania? The man whose winning streak was broken by my client?”

“Kane...” I said, turning to him, placing my hands on his chest. “Let it go. You can get him later, but for now, let it go.”

Kane looked down at me, then back at Paul. Suddenly, he was all smiles. “We'll see you at the end of the night.”

**********

Seth, Kane and I were back in the office. “How could you not warn me about the contract signing??” Seth demanded. “I can't be out there with Lesner, the man is like a caged animal!”

“Rollins, I'm sure Kane has a plan. Right?”

“Of course, and--”

“Please tell me that plan is to not provoke the Beast...” Seth said, hanging his head. “I tried that last week and look how it turned out. Jamie and Joey... the car... I just...” He sighed heavily. “I'm just worried, man... Messing with Lesner does not end well.”

“If you keep this up, it won't end well... for one of us...” Kane growled before leaving.

“Would it kill you to have a little faith in Kane?” I asked. “Giving him that vacation as an apology was well and good, but if you don't prove that you do trust him, he's going to come to the conclusion that you're just using him.”

Seth frowned. “But I am.”

I shook my head. “I kind of figured... Look, I understand why you're doing this, and while I don't agree with it--”

“You never do.”

“Shut up, Rollins. While I don't agree with it, if you're going to do this, then you need to commit to it. Don't give him cause to doubt you, ok?”

“Fine...” Seth huffed.

**********

Dean had a match with Bray, which struck me as odd. Not because of the match itself, but because Dean had requested it.

I should have expected it. Really, I should have. Roman had been stalking the halls of every arena we had been to, which had caused me concern.
Dean went out first, Bray second, and as Bray was taunting Dean, Roman came down the ramp without his usual music. As soon as Bray twirled around, Roman slapped him hard. A fight broke out between them, with Dean looking on in amusement.

“Must have planned it,” Seth said from behind me.

“Not necessarily,” I retorted. “They know each other well enough that-- Oh… Um…” I looked at him carefully. It was strange to talk about Roman and Dean like this with Seth. He didn't seem to feel the same.

Seth just shrugged. “Yeah, I know what you mean. It's fine. I made my bed. Now I'm lying in it. And I'm fine with it.”

“Yeah…” I said, sadly turning back to the monitor. “I know.”

**********

“Rollins! Just… come on! Slow down, will you?” I was keeping pace with him, but seriously, I shouldn’t have to be running after him like this!

“Kane, Kane, Kane,” Seth said, a little breathless. “Is everything ready?”

Kane dismissed the stage manager he had been talking to and turned to us. “Y/N,” he said, giving me a nod. “Yes, Seth, everything’s ready. You have nothing to worry about.”

“Good. Good…because if anything goes wrong, it's on your head.”

I smacked him hard in the arm. He winced, but didn't take back his words. “Damn it, Rollins!” I hissed. He walked away, leaving me with Kane. “Kane, I am so sorry. You know how he is, a complete jerk, so much so that sometimes you just want to smother him in his sleep, and he's not himself today. This whole thing with Brock is taking a toll on him, making him more difficult than usual--”

Kane hugged me suddenly. I was surprised, but hugged him back tentatively. “You deserve a much better person to represent, Y/N.” Kane let go of me. “You trust me, don't you? That I'm doing the best for Seth?”

“Of course. Even if your feelings for him are… um, strained at the moment,” he chuckled at that, “I trust that you will do what's best for business as Hunter and Stephanie see fit. And currently, that's making sure Rollins is protected and stays champion.”

“You get me so well.”

**********

Seth, Kane and I walked out to the ring for the contract signing at the end of Raw. Seth addressed the crowd, stating he was tired of seeing the footage of Brock destroying the Jays new car, and that he would like to remind everyone of his own destructive nature.

I held my breath, nervous about which footage would roll on that giant screen, and breathed a sigh of relief when I saw it was from three weeks prior, when the Jays and Kane had united with Seth again and tore apart Brock. His glee at watching the video was short-lived when Brock's entrance music played and he and Paul came out to the ring. You could just feel the tension in the air. Seth moved me between and slightly behind him and Kane as he and Brock stared down each other.
“You wanna just sign it already?” Seth said, gesturing to the chairs. Brock sat down calmly on the other side of the table in the middle of the ring, his behavior the complete opposite of Seth. He was nervous, his gaze going between Brock and Paul as he took his seat. I was pretty nervous as well, but I didn't let it show.

“Might want to keep your eyes on the Beast, Mr. Rollins,” Paul said. “Though you will have to listen to me.”

I leaned down and whispered in Seth's ear. “I'll keep my eye on Paul, so don't worry about him.”

Seth nodded and his gaze snapped to Brock. Paul continued, his tone serious and somber for once. “Ever since you betrayed your brothers in the Shield, I've been wanting to see someone get their hands on you. I'm sure Y/N knows what I'm talking about.”

“Leave me out of this, Paul,” I growled. “I know you like to go for the ‘low blow’, but I refuse to turn on my client, no matter the provocation.”

He rolled his eyes but put his hands up in surrender. “Ever since you, Mr. Rollins, sold your soul just to be billed as the undisputed future of WWE, they,” he pointed to the crowd, “have been wanting to see someone get their hands on you.” The crowd cheered. “And ever since you broke the eleventh commandment and provoked the Beast, Brock Lesner, ever since you cashed in your Money In The Bank contract, ever since you stole that championship, Brock Lesner has been wanting to get his hands on you.”

Maybe you should try taking him out to dinner first and then see how the night goes, I thought inanely. It was a ridiculous build up that Paul was doing, though Seth's grip on the armrests of his chair told me it was working. I put my hand on his shoulder. I am here, Seth. He relaxed a bit, but not enough.

“See, this is how I see it. All of the pressure is on you. Because everyone who is going to be there, everyone who is watching on the Network, or crowding into the bars to watch with their beer and their chicken wings… They are paying to watch you get your ass kicked by the Beast.”

Seth was seething because he knew it was true. He signed the contract furiously and shoved it across the table. Brock smiled at Seth and signed the contract. Seth let out a slow, calming breath, putting his hands on his knees to help steady himself. I had seen him do it many times before, usually when he was stressed out and needed a moment, but couldn't work out his tension physically. It didn't occur to me that it might look suspicious to Paul.

“Hands! Hands!” Paul screamed. Brock jumped to his feet and Seth immediately put his hands up.

“What? I'm not doing anything!” Seth protested. “See?”

“No, no, no,” Paul said, pointing at Seth, then at Kane. “Neither of you is particularly trustworthy.” His gaze fell on me. “You. Tell the truth. There's something hidden under the table, isn't there?”

“You're paranoid, Heyman,” Seth growled.

I raised an eyebrow at him, then said to Paul, “As far as I know, they don't have anything plann--”

Brock flipped the table over, making Seth jump back. His chair hit the ropes as it rolled over my foot. My curse of pain was lost as the crowd went nuts. Brock pointed at the underside of the table, then pulled up that damn axe handle from the other night. It had been attached to table, but it was odd. The table had a covering around the legs. It would have been impossible to get to the axe handle without being noticed. I felt Kane's hand on my arm, helping me stand up.
“You ok?” he asked.

“Yeah, I'll be fine,” I replied. “Did you put that there?”

He shook his head, anger evident on his face. “No. Must have been Seth, since he trusts me so much.”

“No, couldn't be…”

My attention was drawn back to Brock, who was righting the table and placing the axe handle on it before sitting down. He was staring at Seth, daring him to pick the handle up.

“Rollins… don't do it.” I would have picked the damn thing up and tossed it out of the ring if I was able to.

Seth considered it for about half a second, then picked up the handle, quick as he could, and scurried back to the relative safety of the ropes.

“Y/N, get out of the ring,” Kane said. I didn't question him and slipped between the ropes, standing on the apron as I watched Brock flip the table again, this time to get it out of the way. Seth checked to make sure I was clear before advancing a step towards Brock. As soon as Brock lunged for Seth, I jumped down, grabbing the championship belt from where Seth had dropped it.

All hell broke loose inside the ring. Brock attacking Seth. Kane attacking Brock. Kane and Seth teaming up on Brock. Brock not giving two shits over it and throwing both of them out of the ring. I ran out of the way, nearly getting hit by a flying Seth as Brock tossed him into the barricade surrounding the ring. The top part of the steel steps that led to the ring was used to hit Brock in the head. They tried, they really did, but Brock is in a category all his own and he was too much for them. Seth turned tail and escaped into the crowd when Kane got knocked down and didn't get back up. Brock attempted to chase him, but thought better of it and went back to Kane.

I was kneeling beside him, trying to get him moving. “Kane! Please, you have to get up, Brock is coming back.” He mumbled something about waffles, I think, and sort of rolled over, but he was too out of it. Brock was nearly upon us. My legs trembled as I stood up and stepped over Kane, extending my arms protectively. Brock won't hurt me. I'm a non-combatant. Brock won't hurt me. I'm a non-combatant. Brock won't hurt me. I'm a non-combatant. I kept repeating the words, hoping they would give me enough courage to keep my position. Brock was a lot scarier close up.

“No.”

Brock smiled at me. It was not a nice smile. “Your choice.” He picked me up easily and set me on the apron like I was a doll on display. “Keep that belt safe for me.”

He picked up Kane's leg and laid his foot on the bottom half of the steel steps. I jumped down from the apron, thinking I could at least prevent Brock from doing anything but Paul caught my arm. “I wouldn’t do that. You don't want to get in the way of the Beast,” Paul warned me.

“I can’t let him hurt Kane!”

“Kane can take care of himself. But we’re going to have a problem on our hands if you or I get hurt. Management looks the other way so long as all parties involved are able to defend themselves,” he reminded me. I bit my lip, know what he said was true, but I was right there! Kane was no more than five feet from me!
I turned just in time to see Brock slam Kane’s foot in between the steel steps, a definite *crunch* being heard. Brock dropped the top steps, kicking it to the side as Kane clutched at his now broken ankle in agony. Paul let go of me, backing up a few steps. I was in shock. Brock took the belt from my hands easily, got into the ring and held it aloft to the cheers of the crowd. *How could they?* I thought, dumbfounded. *How can they cheer when a man just had a piece of himself broken by that monster?!* I was brought out of my daze when Brock shoved the belt back into my hands and walked out of the arena with Paul close at his heels.

I dropped it on the floor and went back to Kane’s side. “Kane?” I said gently. Paramedics were already heading down the ramp. “Kane, listen to me, focus on my voice.”

He looked up at me, nodding.

“How is on the way. You need to lay as still as possible. I think… I think your ankle was broken, and moving it around will do more damage than good.” He nodded again, and I remembered he had likely suffered broken bones before. “I’m here with you, ok?”

“Seth?” he asked.

“I don’t know. He ran into the crowd.”

“Figures. Not even two of us could take on Lesner…” Kane groaned. “Still pissed at him…”

I forced a laugh. “Yeah, I can see why.”

“Lesner!”

I turned to see Seth in the ring. He was ranting about how Brock had run through so many, but would not run through him. I ignored him, and focused on helping Kane get through the torment of having his leg bandaged up and being put on a stretcher. The crowd was less than impressed with Seth, however, which was just pissing him off more. *Loser! Loser! Loser!* they chanted.

Seth exited the ring and was about to walk up the ramp, when he turned to us. “So that was your big plan, Kane?” he asked, malice in his voice.

“Rollins, walk away before you do something you regret,” I told him.

“I already have. I regret asking for his forgiveness. I regret sending him on a vacation. I regret trusting him to take care of Lesner with this idiotic scheme!” Seth said, jumping on the base of the steel steps. I scowled at him. “Some plan… I *told* you provoking him wouldn’t work! *I told you!***

I jumped up, but considering how much taller Seth was than me in normal conditions, and with him now standing on the steps, I was less than impressive as I attempted to get in his face. “Kane didn’t do that! That wasn’t his plan!”

“Is that what he told you? You’re so naive, Y/N. Of course that was his plan! Stupid plan from a stupid man!”

“Seth! Stop it!” I punched his thigh, but he continued on.

“You’re nothing without me, Kane! And now you are without me, so you are *nothing!*”

“Shut up, Seth!” I hissed. “Why are you so damn stubborn?! This wasn’t Kane’s doing!!”

He snarled at me. “It was his doing because it was his plan! And what did I tell him?” He turned to
Kane. “I told you that if things didn’t go well, it was on you. This is on YOU!” He jumped down from the steps, walked away, then turned, ran towards Kane and stomped right down on his bad leg.

“Seth!!” I screamed and pushed him away, but the damage was already done. Seth flipped off Kane and stormed out of the arena. “Oh god… Help him!” I yelled at the paramedics, who were looking in the direction Seth had left in, stunned.

**********

“Y/N?”

I looked up from the chair I was sitting in. Kane was awake after sleeping for so long.

“Thanks.”

“For what? For not protecting you from Brock? For letting Seth hurt you further?” I said bitterly. “Don’t thank me, Kane, not when I failed you so miserably.”

He laughed softly. The pain meds were doing their work as he lay in the hospital bed. “No, not for that. For after… for this. Staying with me. It’s nice of you.”

I snorted. “Why does everyone think I’m being nice? I’m being normal. You’re my coworker, and you’re my…” I hesitated, but what I said was true. “You’re my friend. Sure, we have our differences, but we still understand each other.”

Kane smiled. “Yeah. I like that.”

I smiled, amused by his words. “Like what? Having our differences?”

“Not that. Being friends. Don’t have a lot.”

It dawned on me that Kane spent a lot of time at work, and the people he usually hung around with were all Authority members. “Oh…” I got up and fluffed Kane’s pillow nervously. “Get some rest. You have surgery in the morning.”

“Will you be here?”

“Of course. What are friends for?” I said.

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Smackdown - July 16, 2015

“You!” I yelled. Seth took off at a run, but there was no way he was outrunning me. I tackled him in the hallway, and both crew and superstars scattered. “Where the hell have you been?!” I demanded. He struggled, but you don’t have Roman and Dean as brothers and not learn how to grapple. I soon had his arms pinned as I sat on him. “Answer me, Rollins!”

“Damn it! Ambrose taught you that move, didn’t he?!”

“Renee, actually, but she learned it from him,” I told him. “Now answer me. Where the hell have you been?”

I ignored the people around us. Seth continued to struggle, but then suddenly ceased, a weird look on his face. He finally growled and said, “Fine. I give up. I was specifically avoiding you because
I knew you would tell me to go visit Kane and there is no way in hell I’m going to go see him! Will you please let me up now?? This is both embarrassing and uncomfortable.”

“It wasn’t him.”

“What?”

I sighed. “It wasn’t him that put the axe handle under the table.”

“You believe him when he says that?” he scoffed. “So naive. Just like before—”

I slapped Seth. “Don’t. You. Dare.” He clenched his jaw, but he was mollified. I took a deep breath and got off of him. He sat up slowly, leaning forward at an odd angle. “I didn’t hurt you, did I?”

“No, it’s just… No, you didn’t. I just need a moment.” He crawled over to the wall and leaned against it. I waited a moment and then sat next to him. “I’m not going to apologize to him. I don’t care if you believe him or not. I don’t and nothing is going to convince me otherwise. I mean, who else would have done it?”

“How about Paul Heyman?” I asked.

“What? Why would he do that?”

“Because he knew how you would react? It’s no secret that you and Kane are a volatile combination. He also knew you would probably want to have a plan in place. It wouldn't have been hard to set it up, to make it look like how it ended up looking. And now you only have me left. Paul’s smart, and that sounds like something he would do.”

“You don't have proof of it.” He sounded unsure.


**********

Roman addressed the crowd at the beginning of Smackdown, telling them Bray Wyatt was not in his head, that Bray was not making him lose focus. Bray interrupted him and laughed, telling Roman that he had known Roman was behind him on Monday.

If you knew, then why did you allow yourself to get trounced? I thought bitterly. He just couldn’t admit that Roman had bested him.

I didn't like how Bray said that Roman's loved ones were with Bray. Galina, JoJo, his parents… His family is safe in Florida. His family is safe in Florida. I repeated it to myself. The people here, in the WWE, they could take care of themselves. Dean, Jimmy Uso, Naomi, all capable of handling Bray should he try something.

It may be too late, but the less targets Bray has, the better Roman can deal with him. JoJo and his wife are safe in Florida, but you and me…we're here. I can take care of myself. You…not so much. Dean's words from weeks ago haunted me. I only hoped that they were not a premonition.

**********

“Hey, you guys ready for your match later?” I asked. Roman and Dean were each wrapping their hands in athletic tape. “No Bray on your mind?”
“I’m ready.” Roman smacked the end of the tape down. “And more than ready to be *done* with that
dinker. Sunday cannot come soon enough.”

“If he knows what’s good for him, he’ll stay in the shadows,” Dean said. “What we did to him on
Monday was *child’s play* compared to what we will do next time.”

*So they had planned it,* I thought. I sat and listened to them strategize, but also rant about Bray. It
was nice.

“Baby girl, I’ve got a knot that’s kind of bothering me. Think you can…” Roman held his arm out to
me and pointed to his tricep. “I’ve got some massage oil in my bag.”

“Sure. Take a seat, and I’ll have you good to go by the time your match starts.”

**********

“Dollface, where’s my--”

I shushed him and turned back to the monitor. “Don’t call me dollface.”

“What are you even--” I smacked him in the stomach. “Ow. What the--” Smack! “Ow! Stop hitting
me!”

“Then stop talking! Roman and Dean are having their match.” He grumbled and sat next to me,
stealing my water bottle and taking a big swig. “Oh, jeez…” I muttered as Big Show tossed Dean
around like a rag doll. Sheamus tagged in for a bit, but then Big Show went back in. Dean managed
to get out of the way of a Giant Splash, causing a lot of damage to Big Show. Roman got the crowd
going for Dean, who mustered up the strength to tag Roman in, just as Big Show rolled to his
corner and tagged in Sheamus. Roman steamrolled over Sheamus, until Big Show got back on the
apron and caught Roman in a chokehold and tossed him to Sheamus, who did his White Noise
move and pinned Roman. Dean, thankfully, broke the pin by literally running over Sheamus and
then doing a baseball slide into Big Show’s ankle. He followed that up with a suicide dive onto Big
Show, but was caught in a chokehold. Big Show attempted to do a choke slam onto the
announcement table, which Dean reversed into a Dirty Deeds. Both men were laid out and unable
to get up.

“This is going to be the death of me,” I muttered, unable to look away. Seth slung his arm over my
shoulder.

“I can cover your eyes, if you want.”

I snorted. “Thanks, but no thanks. That will just make my anxiety worse.”

Roman and Sheamus were in the ring, both trying to get back up. They got to their knees, and
began exchanging blows, eventually getting up to their feet. Sheamus created separation by
throwing Roman over the ropes, but it didn’t do too much good. Roman got back in and Superman
punched Sheamus. He was about to pin him when Bray showed up and attacked Roman, causing a
win by disqualification. He tried to deliver the Sister Abigail finisher, but Roman reversed it,
pushing Bray into the ropes, bouncing him off and sending him right into a Spear. Bray crumpled
and rolled out of the ring. Roman roared victoriously to the crowd’s cheers.

“Thank goodness,” I said, relaxing back into my chair.

“Now that that’s over,” Seth said, bored. “Have you seen my phone?”
“I swear to the heavens, Rollins, if you lost your phone and more photos get leaked--”

“You’ll save them for later?” he asked, grinning. I glared at him. “No sense of humor. Look, the phone is locked, and I know I had it a few minutes ago. I went to get you a sandwich, you’re welcome by the way,” he pointed at the sandwich I hadn’t even noticed, “And when I got back, I couldn’t find it. I already retraced my steps, so it has to be in here… somewhere.” He looked around. “Help me look?”

I sighed. “Sure.” I pulled out my phone and called his. A loud ringing came from his pants pocket. “And there you go.”

“Well, if you want to do it the easy way,” he muttered and retrieved his phone. I couldn’t help but laugh.
“You're watching Roman's match?” I asked Seth as I sat next to him. I had just come from catering and had snagged the last of the lasagne. Seth grabbed the first bite when I reached for my drink. “Hey!”

“Wot? ‘S gud,” he said through a mouthful of cheese and pasta.

“Jerk…” I stabbed another bite for myself, keeping my eyes on the monitor. I had given Roman his good luck kiss, but I wasn't sure how much good it would do. He barely noticed I was even next to him at the time.

"You don't mind it," he said. I raised an eyebrow at him. "If you did, you would have stabbed me instead of the lasagne. Or started calling me Justin Bieber." His voice dripped with bitterness.

"That really is a strange insult. I mean, sure, the kid's an embarrassment to himself, but he's also really successful. Honestly, it's kind of neutral as far as name calling goes. Neither an insult nor a compliment.”

Seth looked thoughtful. "Huh, I mean, when you put it that way, it could be spun in both directions. Thanks, dollface."

"Whatever," I said, and turned my attention back to the screen. Roman was thrown around by Bray, then Bray was thrown around by Roman. Fairly standard for them, no mind games just yet. Roman gained control outside the ring, and started throwing chairs into the ring for some reason. I almost relaxed. Almost. Then a hooded figure hit Roman from behind, and shoved him into the steel post while the ref was preoccupied.

“Oh shit…” Seth said in a low, shocked voice. “Who the fuck is that…”

Bray drove Roman into the apron, spine first, then rolled him into the ring, gaining the pin. “Fuck… me…” I whispered as the hooded figure rolled into the ring and stood behind Bray.

“Well, if you insist… Ow!” My hand stung a bit from hitting him.

“Who…” I muttered. The hoodie was pulled back to reveal Luke Harper. “No…” The last time I had seen him was right after the King of the Ring tournament. I hadn't paid much attention to the tournament since I was busy trying to get Seth to behave and cooperate with Kane at the time, plus Dean hadn’t made it past the first round. Luke had lost in the first round as well, if I remembered correctly, and had disappeared after his loss to Ryback on the following Smackdown. Erick Rowen had also gone missing around the same time, though it had been a little earlier than Luke.

Both Luke and Erick were former members of the faction known as the Wyatt Family, headed by that psycho Bray Wyatt. They had dissolved their “family” not long before the Shield had broken up, but the Wyatts and the Shield had clashed before. I shuddered from the memories that flooded my mind. “No… Not them… Anyone but them…”

**********

“Roman…” He was lying in medical, his arm thrown over his eyes. Physically, he was fine. Mentally… “How you feeling, Ro?”
“Who’s up right now?” he asked, not moving his arm.

“Cena defeated Owens and retained the US Championship. Miz just walked out to the ring. The match for the Intercontinental Championship was supposed to be next, so he’s probably going to complain about Ryback getting sick.” I took a seat next to him. “Dee will be here soon.”

“Isn’t Seth’s match next then?”

“It is. He told me to stay with you. Says I’ll be safer here than out at the ring. Not like I could do anything even if I intended to. He wants me to watch though, but if you don’t--”

“Nothing would make me feel better than to see that asshole get thrown around the ring by Brock,” Roman said. “Turn it on.”

There was a small monitor that I had to fiddle with before I found the right channel just in time to see Seth get suplexed for the first time, according to the announcers. Dean had joined us by then. I stood behind Roman, who was now sitting in a chair, and massaged his back and shoulders absentmindedly.

He and Dean were chuckling as Seth was suplexed three more times before he attempted to run. We all gasped in shock as Brock jumped the barricade easily to chase Seth and drag him back to the ring. Well, not so much drag as he threw him over the barricade and then threw him back into the ring. Seth managed to land on his feet on the next suplex, and brought Brock to his knees with a series of kicks to his hamstrings and face. He tried to follow it up with a drop kick, but Brock caught him. Two F5s and several suplexes later (lucky number thirteen) and finally the Beast decided enough was enough. Roman and Dean were having a grand old time, but I was ready to leave, go pick Seth off the floor and get him away from that monster. At least it will be over now, I thought. And I'll be Brock's manager… That was a depressing thought. Please, Seth… whatever the long shot plan was, PLEASE do it now!

One final F5, then Brock went for the pin. The ref counted one… two… thre--

A gong sounded. The lights went out, and when they came back on, Seth was no longer in the ring. In his place, there stood the Undertaker and he was pissed. Unsurprising, since Brock had defeated him at their previous encounter, taken away his legacy. It was amazing that he had shown up right when Seth needed him. Incredibly lucky-- And a hell of a long shot…

“I have to go,” I said, grabbing my jacket from my chair. “I'll see you guys later.”

**********

I found Seth in his private locker room, holding a bag of ice to the base of his neck. He jumped when I took it from him. “Oh, just you, dollface… Startled me…” I set the ice pack aside and stood behind him, rubbing his shoulders. All those suplexes had done a number on his muscles.

“So… your plan worked out then…” I said quietly.

He nodded. “Told you it was a long shot.”

“How did you get him here?”

He moaned as I worked out a knot next to his spine. “Sent him anonymous messages from a burner phone, taunting him about Brock, stoking the revenge fire. I knew the McMahons had denied his request for a rematch at Wrestlemania, knew Taker wasn't happy about it, or about his loss to Brock at the previous Wrestlemania. Wasn't completely sure he would show up. It helped that
Heyman didn't shut up about Brock's victory over the Deadman...going on and on about it. I stole his number from Kane's phone while you were talking to him. Remember that day I was apologizing… I didn't go look for J & J in the locker room. I went in there to raid Kane's locker.”

“Ah… I see… So, you used me as a distraction?”

He bowed his head a bit. “Not intentionally… The opportunity was there, and I took it… You mad at me?”

I leaned forward, resting against his back, almost hugging him, and ignoring the sweat. “No, not really. You did what you had to do to beat Brock. I don't completely agree with your method, but I'm not mad about it. I'm actually too relieved to be mad. I really didn't want to be Brock's manager.” His body relaxed with relief. “But you owe me now, Rollins, and I intend to collect. Big time.”

He laughed. “Anything you want, dollface.”

“Don't call me dollface.”

“Anything else you want, dollface.”

“Damn it…”

^v^v^v^v^v

Raw - July 20, 2015

Undertaker opened Raw to the cheers of the crowd. I had chills as I watched his entrance. Creepy. He spoke to Brock, of how streaks were made to be broken, but the disrespect Brock and Paul had shown over breaking Undertaker’s Wrestlemania undefeated streak had brought him back from the ashes. “He's declaring war on Lesner,” I said to myself. This was good. It meant Brock would be preoccupied and wouldn't be coming for the championship for awhile.

**********

Roman's voice could be heard down the hall, I was certain of it. “I want Harper! And I want him tonight!” he roared. Dean was trying to get him to calm down before he went to talk to the bosses. I saw Harper watching him in the distance, a taunting smile on his face.

Dean growled, “And you'll get him, but first you need to--”

“Don't tell me to calm down!” He grabbed a chair and threw it a considerable distance, scaring several crew members.

“Ro! Stop that! Look, why don't you have a seat? I'll go talk to Stephanie and Hunter real quick, ask them for the match, what do you say?”

“Sure. But if they say no…” he growled.

I nodded nervously. I didn’t see any reason why they wouldn’t. The walk to Hunter and Stephanie’s office was a short one, but they were talking business, so I listened and waited for an opportune moment to knock.

“Brock Lesner versus the Undertaker at Summer Slam. This is huge!” Hunter was saying. “We’ve just got to make sure to keep them apart until then. Can’t have a match this big before the event.”
“We’ll need extra security,” Stephanie said. “Oh, you know, we might just need half the locker room, if not all of them, should it come to blows…”

“We’ll go talk to them right now, then.”

Seizing on the lull, I knocked on the door.

**********

Paul Heyman was in the ring, complaining about how Brock should be champion, and it was all the Undertaker’s fault. *He's not wrong, but he's not completely right either.* Seth was dozing on the couch behind me.

He questioned why the Undertaker chose *now* to return for his revenge, and complained that Undertaker’s reasons were idiotic, that *of course* he, the advocate, would bill his client as the Breaker of the Streak, that of course he would talk about it, tell everyone about it. *There's talking about it, and there's being a dick about it, PAUL.*

“Why’s that asshole here?” Seth asked. I hadn’t even heard him get up.

“Responding on Brock’s behalf to Undertaker’s challenge earlier. Brock isn’t supposed to even come here tonight, but… if Paul is here, I doubt Brock wouldn’t be.”

“Yeah, no kidding. Short leash between the two of them.” Seth put his elbow on my shoulder and leaned. “I almost feel bad for setting this in motion.”

“Honestly, it would have happened sooner or later,” I told him. “You just helped it along when it was beneficial to you.”

Paul was winding the crowd up, and ended his tirade with a final jab. *“Undertaker, you may have sold your soul to the devil, but your ASS belongs to BROOOOCK. LESNER.”*

“Oh. Oh, no. He did NOT just say that…” I muttered.

“Oh. Oh no. He did NOT just say that…” Seth snickered.

As expected, the gong sounded, the arena went dark, and when the lights came back on, the Undertaker stood in the ring. He went after Paul, but Brock, who was *supposed* to be far away from the location, came running down the ramp. Undertaker met him in the middle of the ring and the two started going at it.

The security guys came out first, and were quickly followed by the majority of the locker room. It was complete chaos and took nearly fifteen minutes to separate the two powerhouses. It didn’t end there though. I heard the scuffle in the hall, and poked my head out to see them being separated yet again. This time, Brock was escorted out by police. I closed the door before he saw me watching.

**********

Hunter and Stephanie were talking about Undertaker and Brock’s arrests when Seth and I entered their office. “We’re not pressing charges,” Hunter assured Stephanie. “Just… letting Brock and Taker cool off for a bit.”

“Oh ho ho ho ho! That was insane!” Seth said with a laugh. “I can’t believe that happened.” I suddenly wondered if Seth hadn’t told them about his long-shot plan either and his part in bringing the Undertaker back to his feud with Brock. “Are they… are they both gone from the building?”
Hunter nodded. “Didn’t have a choice. Why?”

“Oh! Well... I just had so much I wanted to say to both of them. Probably for the best, I would have lost my temper with them--” I elbowed him sharply. The look on both Hunter’s and Stephanie’s faces made it clear they weren’t buying it. “Uh, anyway, I have a lot to get off my chest. Would it be alright if I go out and address the WWE Universe?”

Stephanie was annoyed, but said, “Yeah, sure. Have at it.”

Seth grinned, thanked them and we left their office.

**********

"I… am never alone…” Bray whispered to the camera. He was gazing at the emblem on the back of Luke’s shirt, an embroidered version of the photos Bray had decorated the walls with, the one with Roman’s eyes scratched out. I shuddered.

"I don't know why you torture yourself with watching that maniac," Seth said to me.

"Because I'd rather be creeped out and in the know, than blindsided by something completely unexpected. Call me crazy, but forewarned is forearmed," I replied back. I didn't mean it as a cut, in fact, I said it nonchalantly, but I heard Seth freeze behind me.

"I… um… about that… what happened between us… I mean… that night after…” he stuttered. It took me a moment to realize what he was referring to.

"Oh… I didn't mean that, but I suppose it does apply." I wasn't ready to talk about that night. I may be ok with Seth for the moment, but I wasn't sure I would ever be ready to talk about the night he betrayed the Shield. "Don't worry, I wasn't accusing you."

"We do need to talk about it, dollface," he said softly. "At some point…”

"And we will," I said, turning back to the monitor. "But not right now."

"You... you chose him. You ANOINTED him…” Bray accused the viewers. I rolled my eyes on that one. The boos that Roman received would state otherwise. There was more jabbering about the falsehood of Roman Reigns, but it was really more of the same that he had said before. "Anyone... but you, Roman... Anyone... but... you."

**********

Roman and Luke’s match was scheduled to begin in a few minutes. I tried to find Roman, but I returned to Seth’s locker room without any luck. It was easier to breathe when I saw that Dean had accompanied Roman to the ring, but when the match was called off after fifteen minutes due to Bray’s interference, I choked down my anger. Bray and Luke started pounding Roman’s face, and Dean tried to help, but they turned their attention to him and sent him flying into the timekeeper's area. Dean and Roman were able to rally, and only when they sent Bray and Luke away in defeat was I able to relax again.

“You ready?” Seth asked me. I had forgotten that he wanted me to accompany him to address the crowd.

“Yeah… I’m ready.”

**********
Seth was very cocky in his strutting to the ring. I got to the announcer’s table just in time to hear Michael Cole mock Seth for wanting to talk to the Undertaker and Brock. *If only you knew*… I thought, but I merely smiled at them and retrieved a microphone for Seth.

“How can you work for such scum?!” one fan yelled at me. I ignored him. “Bitch!” I had known it was a only a matter of time before the fans started to turn on me. I was still mostly well liked, but no one is invulnerable to the hate. The fact that I was in Seth’s corner made some people mad.

“It’s not like she has a choice, asshole!” another fan yelled at the first one. I blew a kiss at the kid in thanks, making him blush about five shades of red. He was wrong about the choice part, but I wasn’t about to correct him.

Seth stood in the center of the ring, basking in the hatred directed at him. The crowd booed him, but it seemed to just fuel him. He ranted about how not one of them believed in him, about how they cheered when Brock took an axe to the car, when Brock took out J & J, when Brock broke Kane’s ankle. I raised an eyebrow at that, since Seth had exasperated the injury by *stomping* on it, but kept silent. “Not to disrespect Brock, we all know what he’s done, the matches he’s had and with who, but I don’t give a damn about Brock Lesner, and the most underappreciated champion in the history of WWE.”

*Eh… maybe if you didn’t act like a spoiled child all the time… Such wasted potential…*

“Last night, I battled Brock Lesner in ways you cannot even comprehend and guess what? *I. Am. Still. HERE.* And you people… You still show me zero respect! But why should that surprise me? You will *never* understand what I have to go through to keep this championship.”

I smiled as the *Justin Bieber* chants started and Seth, for once, didn’t let it get to him. He grinned at me.

“It’s funny… You mock me, but I’m the one standing here, belt still around my waist, while Brock Lesner has the Deadman chasing at his heels. If he was a smart man, like me, he would have been out of here the moment he heard that bell toll, because… *Brock.* The bell now tolls for thee. I can’t help but feel *sorry* for him, actually. Not just that, I also feel, well, a little *robbed* by both Brock and Undertaker.”

I stiffened. *Be careful what you say, Seth!* Just because the heat was currently off him, didn’t mean he was necessarily safe. He glanced at me, as if he heard my thoughts, and winked. *Asshole!!!*

“I have a solution for this, but I need a little help. Lillian Garcia, would you mind…?”

Lillian, the ring announcer, looked up in surprise. I didn’t know what Seth had in mind, but I nodded to Lillian to let her know it was fine. She got up hesitantly and headed into the ring.

“It’s ok, come on in,” Seth said. She stood a couple feet away from him. I walked closer to stand near her and she relaxed a bit.

“It’s fine, Lill,” I whispered. “I’m starting to get an inkling of what he’s going to ask.”

“Lillian, I feel like there was something missing from last night’s match, and I really feel like we need to give that to these… people.” He looked in disgust at the crowd. “So, if you would make the official announcement? The one that should have been made at the end of the match.” I gave him a hard look. “Please.”

“That’s better,” I told him. Turning to Lillian, I said, “It’s already in the record books, might as well stroke his ego and make the announcement.”
“Hey!” The crowd hadn’t heard what I said, but they laughed at Seth regardless.

Lillian sighed. “Ladies and gentlemen, your winner by disqualification—”

Seth grabbed the mike, “Due to the interference by the Undertaker.”

I smacked him. Lillian snatched her microphone back and continued as if she hadn’t been interrupted, “Brock Lesner. And still your WWE Champion, Seth Rollins.”

Seth held the title up high, and I could only assume the boos he heard sounded like cheers in his head. Lillian patted my arm and left the ring. I sighed and waited for Seth to be done with this little moment, but the shrill sound of John Cena’s theme had us both looking at the ramp in confusion.

He entered the ring a few moments later. “Y/N, nice to see you. I wanted to let you know that you don’t have to put up with his crap anymore,” John said, indicating Seth. He turned to the crowd. “All of you, you don’t have to put up with his crap anymore either.”

Seth cackled, but I knew he was annoyed. “John, John, John, so nice to see you again, though I don’t know why you’re out here. Congrats on your win over Kevin Owens last night. It’s nice to see you’ve carved out a little niche for yourself.” Seth pointed at the stars and stripes theme John had going on, from his US Title to the shirt he was wearing. “I assume you’re going to do one of your little open challenges, so I’ll just leave you to it.” John’s US Open Challenges were as divisive as the man himself. Half the locker room thought he was insane for constantly putting his title up, the other half thought it was the best thing ever. Anyone could accept his challenge, but so far, no one had been able to take it from him. I had toyed with the idea of Seth coming out to accept his challenge, but from what I had gathered, Seth saw it as beneath him. “I’ll just be leaving since you don’t have any business with me—”

“Oh,” John interrupted. “But I do. You see, I’m not out here to stop one of your boring monologues, I’m here to thank you. We won our championships on the same night, and in the four months since, whenever people see this title,” he held his aloft, “in one of my ‘little challenges’, as you put it, they know that they are seeing excellence. From both champion and challenger. And it wouldn’t have happened if you weren’t such a slimy, conniving—”

“Hey!” I exclaimed. “I thought you were supposed to be the ‘nice’ one. No name calling.”

John chuckled, but put his hands up in defeat. “He’s still a poor excuse for a champion.” I was ready to fight John right then and there, but Seth put his hand on my shoulder and pulled me back, stepping in between me and John. John gave a little smirk to Seth. “Around these parts, actions speak louder than words.”

“You have no idea what you’re talking about…” I muttered. I knew all the hard work Seth put into being a champion, and yeah, he was a cocky jerk about a lot of it, but that didn’t mean he had coasted on the Authority’s coattails the entire time! Seth shushed me.

John hadn’t heard me and continued, “Your actions make people lose faith in that,” he pointed at Seth’s belt, “and makes them gain faith in this.” He held up his championship again. Seth laughed. The crowd started to chant USA which annoyed Seth. “Oh, shut up! What are you even saying?” he said to them. “Do you even know what you’re chanting for?! And you,” he turned to John, “You come out here, interrupt me, and act like your title is some sort of symbol of excellence when you defend it every week against any Joe-shmoe that comes out. Like that gives it any credence. Well, anyone who challenges me has to earn their shot at this. Don’t talk to me about your title. Don’t thank me. And definitely don’t interrupt me for that. I am not a boy. I am The Man. I am the World
Heavyweight Champion. And you defending that title has more to do with you and nothing to do with the prestige you say it has. It has everything to do with the fact that you can’t stand that the WWE Universe hates your guts, boos you every single time you come out, so you feel the need to placate them with these open challenges.”

“They can’t stand me, that’s true,” John said with a smile. To be fair, it was mostly the men. The kids and the women loved John Cena. The ones who hated John also tended to be more vocal about it.

“Oh, but you don’t ‘care’ about their opinion, so you know what? You can have your little weekly challenges, and protect your little title. I’ll keep mine, and defend it against worthy opponents. Of which there are few,” he snarled. “Let’s go, dollface.”

Seth led me out of the ring, holding the ropes open for me. I was on the apron, Seth was halfway through the ropes when John said, “OH, go on and run, Mr. Rollins. Just like you always do when a challenge shows up. Ever since you became the so-called champ.”

“What did you say?” I yelled, slipping back through the ropes. It may have been true in the beginning, and still a bit nowadays, but Seth hadn’t run from Randy, Roman, Dean and certainly not Brock. He may have run when he was endangered on Raw or Smackdown, but not when the title was on the line. He picked his fights, and he was smart about it, for the most part. When his pride or anger didn’t get the better of him. Where was I going with this?

“I’ve got this, dollface.” Seth stepped back in the ring.

“I’m right here,” John said. “The champ is here! And if you don’t want to be called a boy, then I’ll tell it to you like a man. I think you’re a joke. You ready to man up now? Partner?”

Not going to lie, it was really hot to see Seth hand me the title belt and strip off his t-shirt with that smoldering look in his eyes. “You think I’m a joke? You wanna do this, right here, right now? You wanna prove who the better man is?” Seth taunted him. John had discarded his shirt as well.

“Rollins, you don’t have to prove yourself to him,” I pointed out. I was usually ok with John, but right now, he was pissing me off and I didn't want Seth to give in to his taunting.

Seth laughed, realizing I was right, and waved John off. “You do have a point. I don’t care what you think of me, Cena.” He got out of the ring and held the ropes open for me again.

I turned, but then John said, “Just like I expected. A coward.” I froze. How DARE he.

Turning on my heel, I marched up to the US Champion and stood only inches in from of him, looking up. “If you want a match, you can go through the proper channels, just like everyone else. You may be the US Champion, but you are not above the rules. If Seth doesn’t want to fight you right now, that is his right. You can try to goad him into it, but I won’t let him, because at this point, Mr. Cena, you have gotten on my last nerve and I will work extra hard to make sure you don’t get the satisfaction of a match without putting in the effort.”

“You’re a little firecracker, aren’t you?” he asked, smiling. “Nikki said as much. But I think you’re putting your energy into the wrong course of action.”

I have him a tight smile. “And you are perfectly within your rights to believe that. Have a nice day, John. We’ll be waiting for your match request.”

Seth and I were heading up the ramp when I heard John speak again. “Ladies and gentlemen, the WWE Champion… Seth… Rollins…” The crowd booed. I sighed in resignation.
Seth turned and held his title above his head, smirking. “That's right, I'm the champ!”

John shook his head and held up his title. “Ladies and gentlemen! The champ is heeerrrrrrrrrrreeee!”

The crowd went wild, more cheers than boos.

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“Lana!” I cried, hurrying to her side. Summer Rae was laughing as she walked away from the Russian. “Are you ok?” I asked her. Summer had just slapped Lana for no apparent reason, though I suspected it had to do with Rusev, and the fact that Dolph was out on medical leave, due to Rusev's attack a few weeks ago.

“My pride iz voo-unded,” she said, holding her cheek.

“Let’s get you some ice, ok?” Lana nodded and I led her to catering where I snagged a cloth napkin and some ice from one of the chests. We chatted a bit, nothing too intense since Lana seemed out of it, but the show was still going on and we could see and hear it on the monitor. I tried to keep her distracted during the six-man tag match of Cena, Cesaro and Randy against Kevin Owens, Rusev and Sheamus, but no distraction on earth could have kept her mind off of it when Sheamus walked out, followed closely by Kevin, leaving Rusev alone against his opponents.

“Lana…” I said when she got up, a look of determination in her eyes. “Please don’t…”

She ignored me. Well, no, she gave me a bright smile, and did exactly what I feared she was about to do. She went out to the ring, paying no attention to the men, and made a beeline straight for Summer, attacking with a ferocity I hadn’t seen in her before.

“Wow,” was all I could say as I watched Lana warn Summer to never putting her hands on her again, then walked out, ignoring Rusev screaming at her from the ring. His distraction allowed John to AA him, then Cesaro to catch him for a Swing and Slingshot him right into an RKO, then Randy picked up the win.

**********

"Lana…"

"Vat? I had had ee-nuff of that…” She said a string of Russian words I could not begin to understand, but I could only assume were not good.

"No, I'm not getting after you, I just wanted to say… that was really awesome! I mean, I should be telling you to not do that again, because the Authority doesn't condone such actions, but damn, girl. That was incredibly satisfying to watch."

"Oh… well," Lana smiled and gave a little smile. "It vas satisfying to do."

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Smackdown - July 23, 2015

“You’re sweating like a hog in July,” Summer Rae said in greeting, wrinkling her nose.

“I am aware, Summer. Sorry I can’t be a perfect human all the freaking time.” I was beyond annoyed and Summer was not helping. “Besides, it is July, and it is freakin’ hot out there. Have you
“Talking with some reporters,” Paige said, showing up behind me with Becky Lynch, one of her new partners. “What happened to you?”

“I was at practice and my instructor wanted to talk to me about learning some new techniques. Ended up running late and didn’t have time to shower or change before I got here. So, since Rollins is occupied at the moment, I’m going to make quick use of his private shower. Warn him that I’m in there, please?” I asked Paige, giving her a small smile. I wondered how much bargaining I would have to deal with, since Paige liked to get a little something for favors.

“Of course! I’ll let him know right away,” she said, grinning much too broadly, absolutely no compensation requested. Becky looked as confused as I felt about that smile. “Well? Go on! You reek.”

I should have known Paige was up to something, because when I walked out of the shower in nothing but my own skin, Seth was standing right there, in the middle of the bathroom, frozen from shock. I couldn’t even reach the towel I had on the bar.

Jumping back into the shower and pulling the curtain around me to shield me, I yelled, “Damnit, Rollins! What the hell?!” He didn’t react at all. I grabbed the nearest thing and chucked it at him. The soap to his forehead got him moving.

“Sorry! I’m sorry!” he said, backing out of the bathroom.

Once I got out of the shower and into my own clothes, my heart had stopped racing, though it was still faster than normal. Seth couldn’t even look at me when I came out. “Didn’t Paige tell you I was taking a shower?”

“She, uh… She said under no circumstances was I to go into the restroom in my locker room.” He was staring very intently at my shoes.

“Uh-huh… so of course you had to find out why.” Damnit, Paige, I know you did that on purpose. Her and her damn pranks.

“Yeah… sorry… I didn’t… sorry…”

“I’m not going to say it’s fine, because it’s not, but it happened. Let’s move on and forget about it, ok?” Seth nodded, but he still wasn’t looking at me. I grabbed his chin and made him look me in the eyes. “You tell anyone about this, and I’ll make sure you never have the ability to pleasure a woman again.”

Nothing like a good castration threat to snap him out of his daze. “Damn, dollface… It was just skin. Not like I saw you having sex or something… You’ve seen plenty of my skin.”

I rolled my eyes, but I was smiling. “Whatever. I only said that because you were acting weird.”

He was surprised, but then sheepish. “Sorry. It was unexpected! Why didn’t you shower before you got here?”

I sighed and plopped down on the couch available. “I was running late. My aikido instructor wants me to start learning swordwork. I think it’s too early, but she says I’m ready.”

“You know aikido?” he asked, sitting next to me.
“Been learning. I used to do it when I was kid, quit when I entered high school, and picked it up again last year after…” After Seth had betrayed us, I had been a mess. My therapist had suggested I pick up an activity that could help me refocus. Aikido had been the first thing that popped into my head. I had been making decent progress, considering I was on the road a lot of the time, but I had found an instructor willing to work with me through video calls. We usually had sessions while Seth was working out at his crossfit gym-box-thingies, so it hadn’t come up before. “Anyway, I’m nowhere near fighting anyone in the ring, but I can defend myself, more or less.”

“You’re not sure?”

“Well, I’ve never tried, and my confidence in my skills is questionable at best.”

Seth was twiddling his thumbs. “I could… practice with you. If you want…”

I laughed softly. “Roman and Dean have offered as well, but… I don’t know…”

“You don’t want to disappoint them, I’m guessing. But it’s me! You don’t care what I think. And you can beat me up.” He had a point, which had me considering it. “Maybe. Well, you can try. I mean, come on. I am the champion.” His cocky grin had me giggling.

“You ass. Just for that, I’m taking you up on it.” Seth was way too pleased with himself.

**********

Dean and Sheamus opened the show with their match. Sheamus was being a jerk about Dean's wild side, calling him "reckless" and a "coward" for putting Big Show through the table last week just so he wouldn't have to face Sheamus. It was pure idiocy. I enjoyed every punch and kick Dean threw at Sheamus.

And then, the lights went out, and Bray's music started. That haunting sound that sent chills down my spine. But Bray wasn't alone. Luke Harper stood on the announce table, and Dean only realized when Luke began to howl. I was rooted to the spot, unable to move or help. Dean went after Luke, but Sheamus took advantage, Brogue Kicking him in the face. He threw Dean back into the ring, Brogue Kicked him again, and pinned him for the win. Bray and Luke walked away smiling as Sheamus stood over Dean in victory.

**********

"Dollface--"

"Don't call me 'dollface', Rollins."

"Dollface, who am I up against again?"

I sighed heavily. I was trying to play a game on my tablet. "For the last time, it's Cesaro. You know, the guy you travel with, like, all the time. How do you keep forgetting this?"

"Ah… no idea." He fell silent, drumming his fingers against the table he was sitting on. "So…”

"I swear, if you ask one more time… is there something bothering you or something?" I asked, looking up at him. "I'm here to listen, if you do."

"Do you think I should do an open challenge?" he asked in a rush.

I blinked rapidly at him. "Uh… as in, like Cena?"
"Yeah, I mean--"

"Do you mean this earnestly, or as a way to just poke at Cena?" I asked. I could see it going either way, so I had to know.

"Uh… which do you think I mean?"

I rolled my eyes. "Ok, well that answers that. No, I don't think you should do an open challenge, because I think you're doing it just to be more like Cena. And you're not Cena, you're Seth Rollins and you're letting him get into your head. I would honestly be less concerned if you did an open challenge to mock Cena, rather than mimic him."

"Hmm…” He was lost in thought. I wasn't sure he had actually heard me, so I decided to test it.

"Hey. Remember when you had that Beat The Clock match against Heath Slater, and Dean kept trying to distract you?" I asked. "He put soda and popcorn in your MITB briefcase?"

"Uh-huh…"

"And if you lost, Dean would get to pick your stipulation at your SummerSlam match?"

"Yeah, that's so interesting."

I rolled my eyes. "Did you know that Dean asked for my opinion on what that stipulation should be? He wanted a steel cage match. I told him it would be better to ask for the Lumberjack match. That way, he'd have the advantage of a barrier as well as the potential help from wrestlers friendly to him."

"Sounds great."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "I was also dancing around the ring in a thong bikini before gyrating on the ring post."

"Yeah… good--" He blinked and then turned to me. "Wait, what?"

"Are you listening or are you plotting something?"

"Uh… that's… not that I… did you say you wore a thong bikini?"

"I give up." I got up from my seat. "I'm going to go hang out with Paige and her new pals. I'll meet you in time for your match."

**********

"So… how'd it go earlier?" Paige asked me eagerly. "Did you make any progress with Rollins?"

"So you did do that on purpose!" I exclaimed. "I knew it was weird that you didn't want anything in return!"

Paige shrugged, still grinning. Becky was looking back and forth between the two of us. "Wait, so wat ex-actly is goin' on?" she asked.

Paige waved her off, "Oh, nothing much. Just Seth and Y/N have unresolved sexual tension and I was trying to help. I mean, c'mon! Who wouldn't want a piece of that champ?"

"But… he's a jerk?" Becky looked very confused.
"Oh, but Y/N here has had it bad for him since our NXT days. I helped him out a bit with that Summer Rae stuff and some other times, but she went out of her way to help him, even before the Shield was formed. Not that he ever noticed her, but she also made sure he never knew."

"Paige…" I said, warning her.

"Hey, far be it from me to judge you," she said, putting her hands up. "Personally, I think you're a great influence on him. Not your fault he was an opportunist and went the easy route."

"Oh! That was that big betrayal a couple years ago, wa'nt it?" Becky had perked up at the gossip. "Oh, guess that was a bit insensitive…"

"No, it's fine," I told her. "And yes, Rollins betrayed us. I would be more surprised if you didn't know. And now I'm stuck with him again."

"But are you?" Paige asked, leaning forward, her eyebrow raised. "Are you really stuck?"

I opened my mouth to protest, but then remembered I really was with Seth of my own free will now. "Uh… well that's… um…"

"Oh ho ho ho ho! So you're not stuck with him?" Becky asked, leaning in with Paige. "So, wat is da deal wit you two?"

"There's… there's no deal! I mean, there's nothing between us except…" I struggled to find the right word to describe us. We weren't enemies anymore, that's for sure, and I was beginning to wonder if Seth had ever considered me his enemy as he had considered Roman and Dean. I wouldn't say we were friends either, but it felt more appropriate than just saying we were associates. "We're just…"

"Hopelessly in denial about your feelings," Paige interjected.

"Oh. My. God. Paige! He has a girlfriend. You're friends with her!" I hissed at her.

"Yeah, but honestly, they're not right for each other. I don't think they'll last."

"Wow," I said, surprised. "That's… a bit harsh."

Paige shrugged, but did look a bit sheepish. "Yeah, I feel bad now that I've said it out loud."

"Anyway, there's nothing going on between us, nor will there be," I said, cutting Paige off. "Our history is complicated but that much is clear. We don't have a future together like that."

"Never say never," Paige said. "I see the way you two are. That bond you have. It's not something that can be ignored. Aannnnnd… I could tooootally see him being overcome by your charm--""

"Can we talk about something else? Anything else? Please??" I pleaded.

"Sure," Becky said, but the grin on her face told me Paige had just gained an ally in her campaign to bug me about Seth.

**********

Walking out to the ring with Seth was almost boring. When had I gotten used to the boos? To the cackles that Seth gave the crowd? To the general hostility that filled the arena? I was actually getting plenty of boos myself, thought not even a quarter of what Seth was usually receiving, but it didn't bother me as much as it once had.
I stood with Seth as Cesaro walked down to the ring, and took his championship from him for safekeeping during the match. The bell rung right as I exited the ring. Seth rolled out of the ring just a few seconds later, yelling at Cesaro to not "come at him like that". I shook my head, and leaned on the apron, watching the two men bicker at each other. They may have been car mates, but even Cesaro wasn't about to go easy on Seth. A win tonight would earn Cesaro a chance at the title later on. It was turning into a really good match.

"Come on, Cesaro!" I yelled when Seth got him in a backslide pin. Cesaro kicked out of it, and Seth glared at me, but I couldn't help but smile and wave. Seth flipped me off, but he was grinning a little bit, too. Just a smidge.

I was enjoying the match, but I could see the frustration building in Seth. More and more, until I wasn't surprised when he rolled out of the ring and grabbed the title from me. "We're leaving, dollface!" he yelled. Cesaro just looked at us in disbelief. I shrugged and made a gesture towards Seth. You want him, go get him.

Cesaro nodded at me, then also rolled out of the ring, decking Seth with an Uppercut and then hurling him back into the ring, the title still clenched tightly in his hands. Cesaro gave him another Uppercut, knocking the title out of his hands, and was about to go for the Swing, but the ref was distracted, trying to hand me the title, and missed the thumb to the eye that Seth gave Cesaro. Seth got out of Cesaro's hold, and was able to apply the Pedigree for the win.

"Cesaro is not going to be happy with you on the drive tonight," I told him as we walked back up the ramp.

"Probably not," Seth said, not looking bothered by it. "Wanna drive with me? If he is, I mean. Roman and Dean probably don't let you drive much."

"They don't, so… maybe…" I trailed off as Kevin Owens passed us on the ramp, heading straight towards Cesaro. "Should we…?"

Seth took hold of my arm and pulled me along. "Nah, I'm sure he's got this."

We continued backstage, though I hurried to a monitor to watch as Kevin Owens attacked Cesaro and apply the Pop Up Powerbomb on him to close the show. I had a feeling Cesaro would not be driving with Seth to the next town.
Stephanie and Hunter were too pleased, as if they had had anything to do with Seth's win at Battleground. I tried my best to hide my annoyance as we walked down to the ring all together. Stephanie wanted to address what had happened last week on Raw, and Hunter was excited to open the show, and especially excited to announce that SummerSlam was going to be a four hour event. The match announcements they made for the night had the crowd roaring. I had to admit, it did sound really awesome, and a lot of the matches were firsts, like Sasha Banks versus Paige and Kevin Owens versus Randy Orton. Then Seth started going on about how he knew a thing or two about firsts.

"You were the first NXT champion," I said. I had been handed a microphone like everyone else. I hadn't thought I would actually use it, but Seth was getting on his high horse again, and he was just begging to be teased.

"And the first man to cash in his Money In The Bank contract at Wrestlemania," he replied, turning around to look at me.

"First Shield member to get sick on the road. I told you not to eat those burritos."

He scowled at me. "Just last week, for the first time ever, I went one on one with the Beast Brock Lesner and I did what I said I would do. I walked in as champion. And I walked out as champion."

I nodded. "True. You were also the first to save me when someone tried to use me against you guys." I smiled broadly at him. He grinned at that. Stephanie did not look pleased with me, so I put my microphone down. Seth took his cue from Stephanie as well.

"Alright, to cap off this night of firsts, I think," he turned back to speak to the crowd, "I think that all of you need to participate, and stand up to admit that I am in the running to go down as one of the greatest, if not the greatest, WWE World Heavyweight Champion of all time!" He flung his arms in the air as the boos echoed throughout the stadium, grinning at me as I laughed. I had to admit, he was pretty damn good at being champion. He was also pretty damn good about being an asshole about being the champion, but there probably wasn't going to be an asterisk next to his name in the history books. "C'mon, dollface," he said, "Join me in--"

John Cena's music hit the speakers, and Seth's face fell in annoyance. I was pretty damn annoyed, too. I hadn't forgotten John's disrespect from last week. The utter gall of that man. Hunter seemed to share my sentiment, though Stephanie was amused.

"I don't mean to interrupt you, boss, boss lady," John said once he was in the ring, "But I do mean to interrupt you." He directed the last bit to Seth. Seth rolled his eyes. "Because you're an arrogant jackass. Out of all the hall of famers to hold that title, and you have the audacity to claim that you're the greatest?"

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Seth nodded, unimpressed with John. "And?"

"Annnnnnd… I have to disagree," John said. "I think you're a joke, and I think on a night like tonight, we need to find out who's telling the truth." The ooooonooohhh's from the crowd gave me a bad feeling. "But don't worry, I'm not going to leave it up to you. I asked you last week, and you turned tail like a yellow bellied coward."
"Hey!" I yelled, jumping in between Seth and John. "What did I tell you? You want the damn match, you go through the proper channels. Rollins isn't a coward just because he didn't succumb to your childish taunts."

John laughed as Seth gently pulled me back to stand next to him, his arm around me. "Looks like you're not winning any points with my manager," Seth told John.

John was still grinning. "Well, I am about to take her advice. Stephanie McMahon, Triple H, I'm here to talk to you. Tonight is a night of firsts!" The crowd cheered, and I had a feeling I really wasn't going to like where this was going. "And I know how you feel about me, but I also know how you feel about doing what is best for business. And so I propose, that what's best for business is, that Seth Rollins goes one on one with John Cena for the World Heavyweight Championship!"

The crowd went nuts. I growled and tried to take a step towards John, but Seth held onto my shoulder tightly. Not to hold me back, but due to his own reaction to John's "proposal".

"I got this, dollface," he whispered to me. "Hey, John! How about for the first time ever, you do everyone a favor and shut the hell up?!"

The crowd booed at that. "Hey, settle down everyone," I said. "Like it or not, I made a point last week, and I am sticking to it. John, you may be the United States Champion right now, but that does not give you special privileges when it comes to any other championship title. You want a shot at it, that's fine. Everyone does. But you need to--"

"Hold on, hold on," Stephanie said, walking in between John and me. "I mean, let's take a look here. Just a few moments ago, the crowd was at deafening levels of excitement, so I'm going to ask just once. Do you guys want to see John Cena versus Seth Rollins in a Heavyweight Title match tonight?"

The crowd roared their approval, even starting a Yes chant. Stephanie was enjoying herself too much. Seth was not. "He hasn't earned it!" he exclaimed to Stephanie.

"I hate agreeing with Rollins," I interjected, "but he's right about this. John doesn't deserve a title match just yet."

Stephanie just smiled at us and addressed the crowd. "Well! For the first time ever, I say…" She held the suspense for a few seconds. "Noooooooo!" I shook my head. She was much too gleeful about this, though Seth thought it was funny. "I'm saying no to you, John. I'm saying no to the entire WWE Universe. There will be no World Heavyweight Championship match tonight. Seth and Y/N are right. You need to earn it."

I felt relief, though Seth was cackling. Hunter, on the other hand, was plotting something. "You know… there will be no defense of Seth's title tonight, but…" He smiled that smile I did not like. "But… the idea has merit. So… there will be a match tonight, Seth Rollins versus John Cena. Not for the World Heavyweight Championship…" I waited for the other shoe to drop. "But for the US Championship!"

And there it was. Hunter dropped his mic and then he and Stephanie walked out of the ring. Seth followed them. John looked at me, but I could only shrug. "Sorry? I don't have the authority to stop it."

"But if it was Seth's championship on the line--"

"I still wouldn't have any power," I said, interrupting him. "This is Stephanie and Hunter we're
talking about. I can't overrule them. I would just like to point out that if you win, you'll have your foot in the door for the match you do want."

John gave me a look of surprise. "Huh. You're right. But, you--"

I held my hand up. "I told you. I have no objection as long as you don't take shortcuts to get the match. Good luck tonight."

****************

Dean had his "first ever" match against Big Show. Technically, it was the first ever one on one match on Raw, since they had been opponents in a tag match on Smackdown just recently. I gave him a good luck kiss before he went out, but it didn't do much good. Dean can take a lot of punishment, but Big Show dealt out a lot more than the usual opponents, and several punches later, Dean was too out of it to climb back into the ring before the ref reached a count of ten. Not that Dean didn't get the last laugh. He managed to get Big Show to make one final attack on him and dodged out of the way at the last second so that Big Show went right into the barricade, knocking himself out.

****************

"Oh!! That pink haired… anime obsessed… brat!!" Paige growled, holding an ice pack to her shoulder. She had just finished her match with Sasha Banks.

"You're just mad because she made you tap out," I said.

"Of course I am! That's my thing! It's in the name, the PTO, Paige Tap Out." She was pouting and I took pity on her, hugging her gently so as not to make any of her bruises more painful.

"You'll get her next time, weirdo."

****************

I had to hurry to meet up with Seth for his interview with Renee. I was a bit late, and he was already talking to her when I got there.

"--and who stood toe to toe with the Beast at Battleground and walked away with his championship intact?" Seth asked Renee.

"Well, you, technically…" Renee said.

"Thanks to the Undertaker!" I yelled from the side. Renee giggled at that, though Seth gave me a death glare. I walked into the camera shot. "What? You had it noted when you asked Lillian to announce it to the WWE Universe." Another death glare, and then he turned back to Renee.

"Anyway… enough with the semantics, from both of you. If there's anything I've learned from being champion, it's that everyone wants to tear your down. If it's not one thing, it's another. First, it was 'Seth can't win a match on his own'. Well, ask Cesaro. Ask Randy Orton. You know, ask Dean Ambrose." He looked pointedly at Renee, who grudgingly nodded. "And now John Cena wants to question the validity of my title reign?"

"And you agree with him, Y/N?" Renee asked me. I think she was just annoyed at Seth for bringing up Dean's defeat. She was quite protective of her boyfriend.

"Oddly enough, yeah, I do. Rollins and I don't see eye to eye on a lot of things, but I cannot deny
that he puts a lot of effort into being champion, of doing everything in his power to keep it. I have
to say, I am actually a little bit, just a tiny bit proud of him.” Seth lit up at that.

"Really?!" Renee asked incredulously, killing Seth's good mood.

I laughed at his scowl. "Yeah, I was surprised, too. Not many people get to see him like I do, so I
can say, he does everything he can to be worthy of his title, just not in a way most people would
agree with. Including me. I would honestly like to see him try harder to--"

"Hey, isn't this supposed to be my interview?" Seth asked, pulling the microphone away from me.
"Look, I've got news for John Cena as well as the rest of the WWE Universe. I go out every month
and I defend my title against the best of the best. What does John do? He defends his title almost
weekly in his 'US Open Challenge' against the rest of what's left. He says the future of WWE goes
through him? Well, I say that I've Cena-nough. So tonight, in my match against him, I'm going to
show John that the future has long passed him by." Seth grinned at both Renee and me before
walking off.

"How do you stand being around him again?" she asked me, laughing a little.

"I lie back and think of England," I said, giving her a wink as I ran after him.

**********

I watched the monitor with great anxiety as Bray Wyatt and Luke Harper walked out to the ring to
address the WWE Universe. He went on and on about the lie that is family, that the parents did not
truly love their children, because if they did, they would "have told you the truth!"

I didn't know what "truth" he was talking about, but I knew it wasn't good.

"You have to get them… before they get you. You have to see that the world has sharper teeth than
yours. You have to see that if you are truly family, then you have to push them away."

Ah, so that was it.

"If Roman Reigns truly cared for Dean Ambrose, for Y/N, he would tell them the truth, and the
truth is that they are in danger, and that they should stay out of our way… This is your burden,
Roman, your hill to die on! We are here, Roman, and we will expose you for the fraud you are." He
dropped to his knees, spreading his arms wide. "Follow! The buzzards…"

I really disliked that man.

**********

"Congrats, Becks!" I said, hugging the Irish Lass Kicker. "You're going to have to teach me that
Dis-arm-her sometime." She and Charlotte had just won their match against Nikki Bella and Alicia
Fox, with Becky submitting Alicia. "You too, Charlotte. You both did really well."

"Tanks, Y/N!" I loved how Becky said my name with her Irish accent. It just sounded so much
better.

"So, wanna get drinks with us later? Nattie is in town, giving an update to the bosses on her hubby,
and she'll be there, whether she likes it or not!" Paige said with a laugh.

I grinned. "Sure, I'd love that."
"Hey," Seth said. He was stretching before his match with John. "Do you think I'll get something to commemorate my win over John Cena? I mean, I'll be not only the World Heavyweight Champion, but also the US Champion."

I crossed my arms over my chest and looked at him critically. "I think if you don't get your head out of your ass, you'll be eating humble pie for dinner."

He was upside in a handstand and stood upright, frowning at me. "Are you saying I'm going to lose?"

"I'm saying, if you don't stop underestimating your opponent, you will definitely not win." I put my hands on his shoulders and looked him straight in the eye. "You can beat him. I know you can. But I also know that you tend to let people get under your skin. It used to be one of my favorite ways to tease you, but it can be a problem in the ring. So… just let it go, ok? Anything he says, just ignore it. You are the champ, you are that good, and you can be a double champion." I smiled at him, and then kissed his cheek. "And it would be a first, for someone to hold these two titles at the same time."

He grinned back. "Damn straight!"

Walking out to the ring with Seth was a little different tonight. The energy in the arena was more charged, and I hopped a little bit as we descended the ramp. If Paige saw me, I bet she’d was smiling, since it was her I was imitating a bit. John had gone out first, so Seth walked to the ring a little more cautiously than usual.

Since the match was for John's title, Seth gave me his title to hold on to. The bell rang, and the crowd immediately began chanting. *Let's go, Cena! Cena SUCKS! Let's go, Cena! Cena SUCKS!*

At least they weren't booing Seth, I suppose. The two men grappled for a bit, some tests of strengths against each other, just to test the waters. Then John shoulder tackled Seth, sending him flat to the mat. Seth rolled out, annoyed that things weren't going his way already. He walked around the ring, his eyes on John.

"Hey. What did I tell you?" I asked him when he got close enough to me.

"That I'm gonna win."

"That you *can* win, as long as you don't let him get inside your head. Now, take a deep breath, get back in the ring, and kick his ass." Seth rolled his eyes at me, but also gave me a small grin.

John got Seth into a headlock fairly quickly after Seth got back in, then tried to get him into an Attitude Adjustment after they jumped around the ring and bounced on the ropes, but Seth wiggled out of it just in time and kicked John in the midsection. He was able to pin John, but only got a two count before he kicked out.

It went back and forth like that for a while. One would pin, the other would kick out. Attack, attack, pin, kick. Repeat. Except, each time, it became a bit more intense. It was strange, like a subtle spell was being woven. Punches became kicks, kicks became DDTs, and so forth. Each time, they both stepped it up a bit more. Seth wasn't holding back at all. Each blow was an increase, but it wasn't because he was losing his temper. It was like he was charging up, and when he unleashed the final attack… *He's really going to do it, isn't he?* I thought. *He's going to become*
Then after a flurry of punches, Seth grabbed John's head and jumped in the air to knee him in the face… and broke John's nose. I knew that wasn't his intention, he had only meant to stun John, but I heard the crack of the bone from my place next to the ring. John fell to the mat and rolled to the safety of the ropes. The ref kept Seth at bay while a ringside doctor and I checked on John.

"John, I can stop the match," I told him. "The title won't change hands and it can be rescheduled or just cancelled altogether--"

"I'm not done yet," John growled, and got to his feet. He was like a tornado of punches, attacking Seth with everything he had. Seth pushed him to the other side of the ring to create some space, then charged John, trying to take him unaware. John, the veteran, had enough awareness to catch Seth and send him flying up and over the ropes, but Seth managed to land on the apron and kick John on the side of the head. He then climbed on the ropes, possibly to do a crossbody, but John punched him, dazing him enough to stop it. John climbed the ropes as well. Seth performed a Sunset Flip into a Turnbuckle Powerbomb, sending John into the opposite ring post. Seth went for the pin, but John kicked out. The ringside doctor went into the ring, and I went to Seth's side.

"Seth, this is bad. He's desperate since you broke his nose," I told him. "He's not holding back anything."

"Tell me something I don't know," Seth barked at me. "Gotta get him quick."

Seth got to his feet again, just as the doctor left the ring, but John dodged his charging attack, and jumped on the bottom rope into the Springboard Stunner on Seth, sending Seth bouncing into the corner, and quickly grabbed him for the Attitude Adjustment, but Seth landed on his feet instead of his back and kicked John in the stomach, then a second kick to the face, laying John out flat. He went for the pin. I held my breath. One. Two…

John kicked out at two and a half. The crowd started chanting, This is awesome! Clap, clap, clap clap clap. This is awesome. Clap, clap, clap clap clap.

Both John and Seth got up at the same time, but John got there first, and successfully applied the AA this time, pinning Seth. Seth kicked out on two, but both men were hurting at this point. John crawled to the top of the ropes, but Seth met him up there and suplexed him to the mat, then suplexed him again right into a pin. The gods must have been smiling on John, because he still kicked out! Seth climbed the ropes again, and flipped down in a Phoenix Splash. John rolled out of the way just before Seth hit him, and immediately pulled Seth into his STF submission move. Seth managed to crawl to the ropes, but before he could grab it and break the hold, John pulled him back to the center of the ring and applied the STF again. Seth was yelling in pain and tapped out almost immediately on the second one.

"Oh my god…" I whispered, and jumped into the ring. The ref was checking on John. I pulled Seth to the edge of the ring. "Are you ok?"

"Fuck…" he moaned, holding his left knee. "Felt like my kneecap was going to break…"

The crowd was paying attention to John and his victory lap in the ring, or possibly of the swollen, broken nose that was sideways on his face. I helped Seth get backstage without much notice.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - July 30, 2015
"How're you feeling?" I asked Seth when I greeted him on Thursday.

"Better. Need to ice my knee some more, but it's loads better than it was on Monday." He gave me an awkward side hug. "Gonna start off the show. You'll be with me?"

"Yeah, of course," I said, giving him a full on hug. "Who else is going to keep you from getting killed by everyone?"

"Hardy har har."

**********

Seth was way too annoyed to not yell at the crowd chanting You tapped out! You tapped out! Video from Seth's match with John on Raw had just been played over the arena screens.

"SO WHAT?!" he screamed into the microphone. I winced a little. "'So… what.' I've been hearing those two words from you ignorant fools for too long! You think I care what you think? I stood toe to toe with Brock Lesner, first at Wrestlemania, and then again at Battleground! And, would you look at that?" He patted the championship around his waist. "And still! Yet all I hear is 'so, what?' So what? Are you kidding me?!"

The chanting got louder.

"I've made history time and time again, and that's all you got for me? 'So what?' I oughtta--"

YOU TAPPED OUT. YOU TAPPED OUT. YOU TAPPED OUT.

Seth was grimacing, trying to calm himself. "A man can only take so much, and the unfortunate victim of my rage was John Cena, on Monday, at Raw."

YOU TAPPED OUT! YOU TAPPED OUT! YOU TAPPED OUT!

"I sent Cena to the emergency room with a broken nose!" That got the crowd to stop chanting, though they just switched to booing. "I punched and punched, and unloaded every ounce of rage I felt until his nose was on the side of his face--"

YOU TAPPED OUT! YOU TAPPED OUT! YOU TAPPED OUT!

I found Seth's claim of breaking John's nose because he was angry to be odd. I had seen it close up and firsthand. Seth hadn't been angry. He had been focused, driven, and definitely intense on winning, but not angry. If anything, it seemed like he was purposely spiting the crowd by making this claim, who weren't inclined to believe it was an honest accident anyway. Images of John's face after the match were shown next.

Seth was cackling, much to the crowd's annoyance. "What I did to John was gruesome, but also… it was also beautiful." I raised my eyebrow at that. Seth cackled again. "In a way. I mean, I turned that da Vinci-esqe face into a Picasso. It should be framed in a museum or sold at auctions!"

I had to laugh at that. It was too weird. "Oh my god. You're such a jerk," I told him.

He shrugged. "I am an artiste and--"

Alarms went off, signalling Cesaro's arrival as the crowd started cheering. He walked down to the ring calmly.

"Hey!" Seth shouted. "I wasn't finished!"
"Which is why I came out." The audience laughed. Cesaro, grinning, said, "You were just going to go on and on... and on... but, rather than listen to your droning about how great you think you are, I thought I should be so kind as to point out that you forgot the best part." As he entered the ring, I moved to the ropes, just in case this went south and I had to leave quickly.

"Yeah? And what would that be?" Seth sneered. I was really wishing I had some popcorn so I could sit in the corner of the ring and truly enjoy this. It was promising to be good.

"Oh, just a little thing, really. That John Cena, with a broken nose, made you tap OUT." Cesaro was grinning so broadly, I thought his face might crack.

Seth was smiling, but that little muscle tic on his cheek was very active. "Nah, you got that all wrong. John Cena did not make me tap out." Both my eyebrows went up. I could not wait to hear this. "It was a strategic move. I've got bigger things to worry about than John's little championship." I had to cover my mouth to hide my laughter. Why was he being so ridiculous? And should I save this moment as audio or video to keep on my phone and play back when I needed a good laugh?

"Oh, right, right. You keep telling yourself that, Champ. Strategy," Cesaro said. "Bigger things... like our rematch? Well, I'll leave you to that, and I will see you two," he looked over at me, "later tonight." Cesaro grinned and began walking out of the ring.

"Yeah, that's right, go on and git. This is my ring."

Cesaro turned around at that. A blind man could have seen what was coming a mile away. "Or... you know..." he said, walking back towards Seth. "You're here. I'm here. I could just make you tap out right now."

I loved it when I was right. A referee was running down the ramp as the two men were nearly nose to nose, taunting each other. He pushed them apart and both men got ready for the match to begin. Seth handed me his title and removed his shirt. He had a little bit of trouble when it got stuck on his shoulders. I keep telling him to not wear a size smaller, but he liked how snug it was, saying it made his muscles look bigger.

As soon as the bell rang, Cesaro went straight for Seth's legs, intent on getting him in the Sharpshooter to make him tap out. Considering what John had done to Seth's knee on Monday, if he locked in the submission move, there was a good chance Seth wouldn't be able to withstand the pain long enough to break the hold this time.

He managed to get free of Cesaro, though it was frantic and definitely awkward, and rolled out of the ring, circling around to where I stood on the outside. "Dollface, let's go--"

"No," I told him, holding the championship tightly. "You can do this. Don't run away like last week. You're the Architect! Formulate a plan, don't give him a chance for your knee, and if he gets it anyway, then turn it around on him. Come on... you can do this."

Seth grumbled, and turned his attention to Cesaro, who was pacing inside the ring. The ref was just beginning his countout when the crowd started booing. All of our attentions were drawn to the ramp.

Kevin fucking Owens.

I frowned as he walked down to the ring, his laser focus on Cesaro. Cesaro kept looking back and forth between Kevin and Seth, while Seth was laughing it up, genuinely amused by the turn of
events. Kevin continued towards the announcers' table, joining the commentary team.

Seth got back in the ring, but my attention was distracted. I kept looking over to Kevin. I did not trust him to "just" be a spectator. He proved me right when he jumped into the ring to attack Cesaro. Granted, he saved Seth from being swung around the ring, but Seth was upset at Kevin's interruption, getting in his face as the referee checked on Cesaro, but then the two seemed to come to an agreement and both started stomping on Cesaro.

"Damnit, Seth!" I yelled, jumping in the ring as a few other referees came in to break it up. I pulled Seth to the corner and caged him there with my own body. He could have pushed me out of the way easily, but he was laughing too hard. "What the hell?!

"Your face, dollface," he cackled.

I growled. "No! Not 'why are you laughing', it's 'what the hell were you thinking joining up with Kevin Owens?!' He's such a… He…" I was so mad, but I didn't want to say, _He betrayed his best friend the same way you did._ I hated that it bothered me, since I had made peace with Seth's betrayal already. "He's not a good match for you. Maybe a good match against him, but not with." Seth rolled his eyes. "It's not a big deal. Get over it. Besides, he's doing plenty on his own." He pointed behind me. I turned to see Kevin stomping on Cesaro again. I shoved Seth's championship at him, then ran over to Cesaro to check on him. The refs had gotten Kevin away from him, and were getting him to leave the ring.

"Hey… Cesaro… you ok? You dead?" I asked as I knelt next to him.

He coughed a bit. "Fucking hate those guys…" he muttered.

"Yeah, I get that." I helped him to a sitting position. "What do you want me to do about it?" He snorted. "No, seriously, tell me what you want. I'll try to make it happen."

Cesaro turned to stare at me. "Uh… well, I want to fight both of them."

It was my turn to snort. "Not in a handicap match, or a triple threat." I thought about it. "Tell you what, I'll see if I can arrange a tag match. Think you can find a partner?"

Cesaro nodded slowly, not quite believing I was trying to help him. "Yeah, shouldn't be a problem."

I grinned at him. "Don't worry, I'm on your side for this one."

**********

It only took a little bit of convincing to get Stephanie to agree to make the tag match, and I think her only hesitation to it was the fact that it was _me_ asking for it.

**********

Luke and Bray's video made my skin crawl. They were warning Roman again, saying that Luke would give his life for Bray's cause. _Would Ambrose and the lovely Y/N do the same?_ Bray asked with a slight sneer.

My eyes narrowed. _You fucking bet I would_, I thought angrily. _But I would gladly take Luke's life for your cause instead._
"I told you to be careful inviting the devil into your yard… He might just like it there." Bray's tone was irritating me. "We're here to fix the mistake. Anyone but you, Roman… anyone, but you."

**********

I was disappointed to hear that Cesaro had decided to not ask anyone to be his partner. "If anyone wants to join me, I won't argue, but no one owes me anything, so no, I won't change my mind about this," he told me. I opened my mouth to argue, but he stopped me. "I know what I'm getting into. So, please don't try to go behind my back and arrange for a partner. I respect you, and hope you respect my wish on this."

I really wanted to argue, but he was just so dead set on it. "Ok," I said in defeat. "Good luck."

"Thank you, Y/N," he said. "I appreciate that."

**********

Seth was chipper on his way to the ring, walking with a spring in his step, while I was walking slowly, shuffling along. As far as I knew, no one had stepped up to tag with Cesaro. I had kept my promise, much to my chagrin, and hadn't tried to find a partner for him.

My fear was cemented when Cesaro came down to the ring and told the referee it would only be him.

"Are you sure about this?" I asked him as Seth and Kevin were talking to each other, grinning like cats about to go up against Cesaro the canary. "I can delay the match and--"

"No. It's fine, Y/N." He looked over at Seth and Kevin. "Probably won't be car mates for a while."

"Well, that's understandable," I said, giving him a small smile.

"It's too bad," Cesaro said. "He finds the best coffee."

The ref was about signal the start of the match when Dean's music started. I couldn't help it, I screamed in my excitement.

"What the hell is wrong with you?!!" Kevin shouted at me.

"Hey! Don't yell at her," Seth snarled at him. "She won't interfere, though she'll probably cheer for them. Just ignore her, got it?"

Kevin stared at him. "And you keep her around?? You have issues, man. She cheers for them, and we're going to have a problem."

Seth growled, but pulled me to the side. "Think you can keep the cheering to a minimum?"

"I can just go backstage if you don't think you can trust me," I said, crossing my arms over my chest and not looking at him. I had not been planning on cheering for Cesaro since Seth was tagging with someone who was unfamiliar with my managerial style, not even when I saw Dean appear, and I was offended that Seth thought I would mess with them like that. I suppose I should have mentioned it, since I did do it so often, but still!

"Dollface…" He sighed. "Don't pout."

"Oh, I'm sorry. My feelings are hurt right now, but I'll try not to show it so you don't feel bad," I snapped. He grimaced.
"If we weren't in front of a shit ton of people right now, I'd just hug you until you stopped being a child." I glared at him, but he continues. "So I'll just say this, I'm sorry if I offended you, but I can't have you--"

"I wasn't planning on cheering for Cesaro," I interrupted. Seth looked surprised. "Kevin isn't familiar with the way I 'motivate' you, and I didn't want to throw either of you off. I guess I should have told you, but I didn't think it would be an issue."

"Oh." He looked thoughtful. "Is that what you call it? 'Motivation'?” he asked, chuckling.

I shrugged. "It works, doesn't it?"

"Yeah, I guess so. Fine, it's up to you, stay here, or go back stage. I won't complain either way."

I sighed melodramatically. "I'll go sit with Jimmy at the commentary table. I'd rather be here than backstage, and if I'm with the announcers, then you and Kevin won't hear my snide remarks." I grinned at him, but he just shook his head, laughing.

"Brat."

**********

"Heeee~y, Y/N," Jimmy Uso said, winking at me. I smiled at him. Such a flirt. It was harmless, of course. He and Naomi were too much in love for it to be anything else, plus he and Jey were on the same level as Roman in my eyes. Gross brothers.

"Hey." I turned to the other two commentators. "Hope you guys don't mind me joining you," I said, taking a seat next to Jimmy. He handed me a headset.

"Of course not," Tom Phillips said, giving me a brilliant smile. "Always happy to have you around."

"Yeah," Jerry Lawler said. "Always nice to have a pretty face here. Usually just have to look at these two."

I gave Jerry a tight smile. He tended to creep me out with his overt sexualization of the Divas. "Well, don't mind me too much, just trying to get a good seat but not get in the way of Rollins and Kevin. I don't really have a lot to contribute as a commentator." The bell rang, signalling the start of the match. Dean and Seth went at it immediately like a couple of alley cats fighting over some food.

"Oh, don't say that," Tom told me. "Just… say whatever comes to mind. Ah, keep it PG though!

"Well, fudge this. If I can't flip out and say a single fudging bad word, I might as well go to the fudging back!" We all laughed.

The cameraman signaled that we were coming back from commercials. "Welcome back to Smackdown," Tom said into his headset, "during the commercial break our main event started, and we have a treat tonight. Joining us on commentary is none other than the Champion's own manager, Y/N!"

"Hi, Tom, Jimmy. Jerry…” I had to force myself to smile at him. "Thank you for having me. I thought for sure the treat would be the fact that my brother, Dean Ambrose, came out to join Cesaro as his tag partner!"
Tom laughed. "I guess you could call it a double treat then. Cesaro had previously said that no one owes him anything. Y/N, did you have anything to do with Dean coming to his aid?"

"I did not. Cesaro asked me to respect his wishes and not interfere on his behalf, and I did just that. Dean came out here without any prompting from me, and to tell the truth, I haven't seen him since before this match was announced." I had actively hid from everyone except Seth after talking to Cesaro, just so that I wouldn't be tempted to break my promise.

"It's no secret that you and Seth Rollins butt heads on a lot of things, including what's best for his reign as WWE Champion, but rumor has it that you have been known to go behind his back to get things done," Tom said.

"That is no rumor. I believe Rollins can be a good, if not great, champion, but he's got a lot of growing up to do." I watched as Dean tossed Seth hard into the mat, and then grabbed his legs and dragged him over to the corner Cesaro was standing at, tagging him in.

"Well, Cesaro may not be owed anything, but I'm sure Dean Ambrose believes he owes Seth Rollins something!" Jerry said with a laugh. "He may even be holding a grudge since Seth took you away from him and Roman."

I grimaced. I really hated talking about this. "My brothers and I are as close as we can be. Me being Rollins' manager has not changed that. Yes, they might be a bit more protective, but they know where my loyalties are and they understand that I do what I have to do, just as I understand that they do what they have to do. Plus, Dean doesn't need to use me as an excuse. He's already gone on record saying he'll fight Rollins just for the hell of it."

"Huh..." Jerry said, "So--"

"Are you trying to pick a fight, Jerry?" I asked, annoyance creeping into my voice. "I am a professional and I pride myself on that. At the end of the day, I will do what is best for my client, even if my brothers don't like it. They are still my brothers, and nothing will change that. Please concentrate on the match, and not whatever it is that you're trying to do concerning Roman, Dean and myself."

"Well, Cesaro is trying to create some separation and get to Ambrose to tag him in. Kevin has effectively been cutting the ring in half, keeping them from making the tag." Tom looked over at me, giving me a thumbs up. Cesaro jumped out of the way of a charging Kevin, and Seth tagged in when his tag partner went shoulder first into the steel post. "In comes Rollins," Tom said, "but Cesaro manages to dodge his attacks, and tags in Ambrose! The two former brothers going at it."

"I'm just saying," Jerry said, "If it was my sworn enemy, I would do everything in my power to trip him up. Seth Rollins stabbed not just Roman and Dean in the back, but you as well. If I were you, I'd use that trust Seth has in you to return the favor down the line."

"Come on, now," Jimmy said to Jerry. "Y/N's better than that."

"I refuse to believe that the thought hasn't even crossed her mind," Jerry said. "She's only human!"

Seth had turned the tables on Dean, and delivered a Superkick to Dean's jaw. I winced mentally, but kept my voice cold as I said, "I am indeed only human, and I am very much aware of what Rollins did to me, to Roman and to Dean... but the fact of the matter is, it never once crossed my mind to do that to him, and if you'd use the position of manager to the champion in order to get revenge, well, then that's just the difference between you and me."
"Cesaro tags back in, and takes both himself and Rollins over the top rope--"

"You're saying you're not even the slightest bit tempted to betray Rollins the way he betrayed you?" Jerry asked over Tom. "He trusts you to watch his back, and you could take him down easily! Don't your brothers want you to do that? Don't you want to get that revenge?"

"To what end?" I asked Jerry, standing up to face him. I leaned over Jimmy's section of the desk, who backed away a bit. "I'm still going to have to work with him, unless I do something to make him lose the championship. But what does that say about me, about my work ethic, about my honor as a manager? Seth betrayed me, and he had to live with that, assuming it bothered him at all. If I did the same, I would have to live with my actions and whatever consequences happened, and frankly, I don't think I could do that. Setting that aside, your thinking is too short sighted, while I'm planning for the years to come."

"Sounds like the Architect," Jerry said, an annoying smile on his face.

"Well, I did learn from him for a little more than a year and a half," I snapped. "I'm looking out for me, just as my brothers are looking out for themselves. And if that means I have to help Seth Rollins, then so be it. As I said, my brothers and I have an understanding. It's going to take a lot more than me working with Rollins to break that bond. I've answered your question more than once now, so move on."

"Damn straight," Jimmy said, standing up and throwing his arm around me. "She's blood to me too, Jer, so quit picking on her, else you and I are gonna have some words."

I laughed, the anger that had been building up inside me suddenly released as Jimmy bickered with Jerry. We sat back down, Jerry's attention finally back on the match. I covered the microphone of my headset to whisper to Jimmy, "Thanks."

"Anytime, Y/N," he whispered back. I made a mental note to take some time out to visit him and Naomi the next time Roman went to hang out with them. While I knew Jimmy and Jey, I had never gotten to know Naomi, despite the fact that we were basically in the same circle of people.

"Oh my god!" Jerry exclaimed. We both looked to the ring. Cesaro had rolled up Kevin into a pin, and got the three count, winning the match. He leapt over the ropes and ran to the announce table, climbing over it and the barricade to stand with the Cesaro Section, a group of people holding up signs declaring themselves for him. "I can't believe it!"

"Believe that, Jerry!" Jimmy said, grinning from ear to ear. "Whoa, watch out, incoming lunatic!"

Dean jumped up on the announce table just as Cesaro returned to this side of the barricade. The two men hugging and celebrating their victory. I patted Dean on the back. "Good job out there, Dee."

He grinned at me. "You gonna go pick the champ off the floor now?" We both turned to see Seth crawling away on his hands and knees.

I sighed. "It's what I get paid to do. I'll see you later."

"Count on it, kiddo."
“That’s weird,” I said to myself, looking down at my tablet, “why is Rollins scheduled for a meet and greet tomorrow? I thought he had that meeting with--”

Someone called my name from behind me.

I turned to see who was rude enough to interrupt me and froze. “D-Dan?”

Daniel Wayne, my ex-boyfriend, stood there, grinning from ear to ear. “I thought that was you! How are you?” He enveloped me in a hug, either not noticing how stiff I was, or choosing to not notice.

“W-What are you doing here…?” I asked cautiously. The last time I had seen him had been before I had met Seth, Dean, or even Roman.

“I work here. I’m the sales manager of the arena, just got the promotion.” I didn't say anything, I was too surprised to see him here of all places. “I moved here a few years ago, got this job while trying to jumpstart my career, ended up doing well, and… here I am. And you? How you been?”

I was still in shock. “I’m… fine?”

“Hey, maybe we could get some dinner tonight? After the show? Catch up a bit?” He looked so hopeful, I almost said yes. Almost.

“I don’t think that’s a--”

“Who’s this clown?” Seth draped his arm over my shoulder and stared down at Dan. “And why is he bothering my girl?”

“Oh, I didn’t… this wasn’t a date,” Dan said apologetically. He held up his hand to show off his wedding ring.

“Didn’t say it was.” Seth snarled. “I said you were bothering her. And no one bothers her except me.”

I bit back a laugh. “Did you just…”

“Yeah, I did. It’s true.” Seth relaxed a bit. “Now who the fuck are you?”

“I’m Dan Wayne, sales manager for this arena.” He held out his hand to Seth, who shook it a bit more forcefully than necessary. “I honestly just wanted to catch up with her, I swear. It’s been, what? Four years? Five?”

“Six and a half,” I said quietly.

“See? Lots to catch up on.”

“I can’t, Dan. Maybe another time;” I said, feeling more confident now that Seth was there. “I really need to get back to work now.”

“Oh, yeah, sure. See ya.”
Seth dragged me out of there and to his locker room, shutting the door firmly behind us. “Ok, seriously, who was that guy?” he demanded.

“No one.”

“Hey. I saw the look on your face when you first saw him. He’s not ‘no one.’ He’s definitely a someone.”

I sighed. If I was going to tell anyone, at least I knew Seth would be understanding. Probably.

“Fine. He’s... he’s my ex. We broke up before I went to work for FCW. Actually, he’s… he’s the reason I moved to Florida. I was running away from him, from the embarrassment. And... he is also the reason I vowed to never date wrestlers.”

Seth stared at me in horror. “HIM?! He’s the reason??? That scrawny little--”

“Hey,” I said, slightly offended, "it was a long time ago, and I was… I was very excited about it. He was a wrestler that I admired on the local scene, and he asked me out. Me. I was starstruck and thought I was in love.” I sighed and sat down. “I was an idiot.”

Seth sat next to me and put his arm around my shoulders, pulling me into an awkward side hug.

“What happened?”

I leaned into Seth. “He cheated. He told everyone at home that I was his one and only, but when he was out there, on the road alone… he forgot I existed.”

“I’ll kill him,” Seth said, getting up, but I grabbed his hand before he could take a step.

“Don’t kill him. He’s not worth it. Besides, I never would have met you, or Dean, or Roman, if he hadn’t done that. So… let it go.”

“But…” Seth growled at the door, then yanked me up from my seat, hugging me tightly. “Fine. I’m sorry that happened to you, but I’m glad you’re here.”

I hugged him back. “Me, too.”

“Is there anything I can do for you?”

I pulled away from him slightly so I could look him in the eye. “Yeah, don’t ever cheat on your girlfriend again. I would have kicked your ass if I had been around the first time, but I will destroy you if you do it a second time.” Seth paled a bit at that and I realized I may have overstepped my bounds. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to--”

“No! I mean... No... don’t apologize. You’re right. It was a shitty thing I did. It’s something I have to live with… She didn’t deserve that. Neither of them did, but… I’m doing better. I vowed I’d do better. And my mom did kick my ass. Said she brought me into this world, and she can take me out just as easily.”

I laughed. “Man, I love your mom. Can’t wait to see her again this week.”

“She can’t wait to see you either,” Seth said with a smile. "Oh, and I've got a surprise for you, but it won't be ready until right before the show starts."

"If you got me something that Dean's going to get mad at me about--"

"Not this time," he said, grinning. "You'll see!" I just shook my head and went back to my work.
The show opened with a memorial video of Rowdy Roddy Piper. It brought tears to my eyes, some happy, some sad, as I stood in between Seth and Miz. Everyone was out on the stage, paying tribute to the man. I held onto Seth's arm, leaning my head on his shoulder as the video played. Roddy had passed away the previous Friday, from a heart attack, if I understood correctly. He had been entertaining to me as a fan, and annoying to me as a member of the Shield, hence both good and not so good memories. The last time I had seen him in person had been on the Old School Raw episode, back in 2014 when the Shield had been guests on his segment, Piper's Pit. He had been trying to pull us apart, though I no longer held that against him. It was difficult to stay mad at him, especially when he had sent me such a nice letter later on, apologizing. I had thought it was a joke at first, but as far as I could tell, it was a genuine letter. He had noted that he wasn't apologizing to the guys, just me. That had made me smile.

That run-in with him had been during the ending days of the Shield, the cracks slowly widening between the three men, and then there had been me, trying desperately to fix things. In hindsight, I felt that I had been trying to hold water in a sieve, but who knows? Maybe, if things had been a little different, if I had been stronger, if I had been able to stand up to them, maybe we would have been able to weather that storm.

On the other hand, maybe it had been inevitable. Roman, Dean, Seth… all three were alphas. The combination had been a powder keg, ready to blow if things became too volatile. I had simply been trying to follow all three of them, trying to keep the peace.

Seth was getting ready to go out to address the crowd, and he had a new shirt for me to wear. "Never Shuts Up?" I asked, reading the shirt. I looked up at him dubiously.

"Yeah! Like John's 'Never Gives Up', except more my style."

"You're an idiot and I'm not wearing this." I shoved it towards him.

"But--"

"No! I don't agree with this! I get what you're doing, sort of, but you're being an asshole, which I am not going to enable." I crossed my arms over my chest, daring him to argue with me.

He stared at me, probably weighing the pros and cons of trying to continue this conversation. "Fine. But you're still wearing my old shirt."

"Happily." I had cut off the piece on the back that said "Don't Sell Out, Buy In", as well as the sleeves, and added a lace-up on the back of the waist area to make the shirt more form fitting. It had a slight steampunk vibe to it, which Becky approved of. All my working out and aikido training made my back muscles and shoulders really nice to look at, so I liked showing off a little.

"Ok, let's get out there then. I've got another surprise for you and the WWE Universe."

"There's only one person who can slow me down…" Seth told the crowd. "And that person is… Seth Rollins!"

"For a second, I thought you were going to say Seth Rogan," I told him. He chuckled, too pleased with himself to care about my comment.
There was so much booing, it was quite hilarious. I stood to the side, wondering if Roman and Dean would be angry if I said I was driving with Seth again. Cesaro and he had made up, more or less, but… they actually let me drive, while Roman tended to hog the wheel. Back in our Shield days, Seth had been the designated driver and I had been the navigator, but he had switched with me often enough for me to not mind. There was something freeing about driving the open roads, listening to music or podcasts.

"Hear me out, hear me out. There's something I noticed, a flaw. I've got a problem and that is… I really have too much sympathy."

"Oh my god, now this I've got to hear." Seth just grinned at me.

"It's been plaguing me for so long, and truly, I'm too sympathetic for my own good. If you need an example, look no further than last Monday on Raw, when I rammed my knee into John Cena's face. Just take a look." He pointed to the large screen above the ramp, where the video and replay video were played. Some of the crowd chanted Thank you Rollins! while others booed. Seth was amused. "Guys, guys, guys… it was disgusting. I felt John's nose just… CRACK on my knee. I heard the pop as it shattered. And… and at first, I didn't feel bad, it's something that sometimes happens in the ring. It's not the first time I've smashed someone's face and it probably won't be the last, though it certainly was the first time I broke the face that runs the place." He grinned at that.

"So clever," I said sarcastically.

He shrugged. "But then… well, mothers at home, and here in the arena, shield your children's eyes, because this is a gruesome sight." He pointed to the screen, where two photos of John and his broken nose were displayed. He was not kidding. It really was a terrible thing to see. Seth started talking again. "It was in that moment, when I saw that looking back at me, that I realized I couldn't go through with the match. And the only right thing to do, was for the ref to call the match and award me the US Championship."

So many boos for that.

"I know!" Seth said, "I was disappointed too!" I snorted from laughter. "But, John and the ref decided to keep going. And clearly the referee is not the humanitarian I am, since he did side with John and allowed the match to keep going. So, as the match went on, and there I was, still feeling sorry for John. He caught me in my sympathy and that is on me. I take full responsibility for that."


"I guarantee that that will never, ever happen again. To that effect, I have a proposal, John." He smiled, looking very pleased with himself. "Why don't you meet me at SummerSlam? Bring your championship, I'll bring mine, and we can go one on one, title for title, in a Winner Takes All match!"

My jaw dropped. Of all the things I can say I would have expected Seth Rollins to do, ranging from likely to highly improbable, that would not have even made the list.

"And, well, John… if you don't have the guts to show up, then you're not as tough as you think you are, and you might as well just hand over the title to right now."

I sighed and shook my head. I almost hoped that John said no, just to agitate Seth. Childish taunts... I sighed again.

"Now, as for tonight, Raw is definitely the place to be!" The crowd cheered. "Oh, not because of
"...you guys, because of me!" I had to chuckle at that one. The crowd didn't find it as funny, however. "The champ is in the house! And let us not forget, this is the same city where I won my WWE Heavyweight Championship!" Boos. "And the site of the very first John Cena Open US Challenge! So, to 'honor' these two events and since anything John can do, I can clearly do better." He looked down at his shirt. "Tonight, for the first time ever, I will have the WWE World Heavyweight Title Open Challenge!"

My jaw dropped for the second time. Who is this, and what did he do with the real Seth Rollins?

"Now, this starts..." He checked the nonexistent watch on his wrist. "Right. NOW! So you want some? Come get some! Who's it gonna be, because the champ is here!" He dropped his mic, hands raised in the air. "Who's it gonna be, huh? Who's it gonna be?"

I finally found my senses again and stepped up to him. "Oh my god, are you actually serious about this?"

"Yes, but there's a catch you should know about--"

"Seth!" Jojo, the announcer, ran up to him, microphone in hand. "A word?"

"Of course. The champ loves interviews." He grinned.

"You just like that the attention is on you," I said. Jojo laughed, and Seth just looked amused instead of annoyed. I was going to have to try harder.

"So, Seth, is this match legitimate?" Jojo asked.

"Yes! Well, as I was about to explain to my manager, there are two stipulations to this match," Seth told Jojo. "It was the only way the Authority would agree to this. First, the guy has to be under six feet tall, and second, weigh under two hundred pounds." The crowd booed. "Hey, I don't make the rules!"

That actually did sound like stipulations Stephanie or Hunter would make, and Seth wouldn't have argued with it. This sounded more like the usual Seth.

"So..." JoJo said, "You're going to fight El Torito?"

Seth pretended to be shocked. "Oh! I guess he does qualify! Come on out, El Torito! Today is your lucky day!"

I could think of at least two other wrestlers who also fit the bill. The theme music for El Torito started up, but was interrupted by the first wrestler I had been thinking of. I smiled as Neville made his way down to the ring. Now Seth looked annoyed, at both Neville and at my smile as I took my place outside the ring.

**********

The match was actually really good, with Seth nearly losing and kicking out at two and three quarters, then again after Neville landed his Red Arrow move, though Seth broke that count by putting his foot on the ropes. Neville tried again, but at the end of it, he couldn't land the Red Arrow a second time. Seth rolled out of the way, then Pedigreed Neville hard into the mat, pinned him, and retained the championship. The crowd booed, which irked me, because both men had fought really well.

"I'm proud of you," I told him once we were backstage.
"Why? I almost lost my championship." He was sulking. I smacked his arm.

"But you didn't. That was a wonderful match! And while I know you probably didn't think things through, you opened yourself up to a huge challenge!"

Seth looked at me, confused. "What do you mean?"

"The stipulations. The guys who qualified for them were more in the 'high flying' category, which is not what you're used to going up against."

"Wait... what other guys?"

I shook my head and pulled up some data on my tablet. "I figured as much. You had no idea what would happen with those rules. Ok, so, other guys who qualified under your 'rules' are Kalisto and Sin Cara of the Lucha Dragons, and then there's the guys from NXT, Enzo Amore, Finn Balor and Hideo Itami, if he wasn't on the injured list."

"Shit... should have made it a hundred and fifty pounds."

I smacked him. "Hey! Stop being a jerk and let me be proud of you for at least a minute before you ruin it!" He laughed and grabbed me, pulling me into a sweaty hug. "Ahhh! Let me go, jerk!" I yelled, secretly pleased, even if he did stink.

**********

My good mood vanished when Bray and Luke appeared on the screen, talking about Roman, warning Dean about the consequences of his choice, of choosing to stay by Roman's side. "You were warned, Dean Ambrose, but you are too chaotic for your own good. Your little sister was wise to step back from you, to hide in the wings of the traitorous Seth Rollins, and thus, she is spared. For now."

I had to grip the edges of my chair, just to keep myself from going to find Bray Wyatt and giving him a piece of my mind.

**********

Seth insisted that I leave the arena with him. In a rare occurrence, Roman and Dean agreed with him. It was enough to make me check their foreheads for a fever. "We're fine, baby girl," Roman said, pushing my hand away. Dean leaned into it, and I started scratching lightly at his temple, giggling as he acted like a puppy. Roman pushed him away. "Look, I hate to say it, but being with Seth is probably the safest place for you. I don't trust Bray and his 'for now'. The further you are from him, the better."

"But..." I looked over at Seth, who was clearly trying to listen in while pretending not to. "Will you just come over here already. Damn snoop." I waited until he was next to me before I continued. "But what if you need me? I know there isn't a lot I can do, but if there's anything I can do to help, I want to be there for you guys."

"Pray it doesn't come to that," he said and kissed my forehead. "But the best thing you can do right now is keep yourself safe." He cleared his throat and spoke more gruffly, "You hear that, Seth?"

Seth scowled. "I can keep her safe just as well as you can, Roman. If not better."

Dean scoffed. "That remains to be seen. She gets one boo boo, one scratch, one papercut," he drawled. "And I will rip a chunk of your flesh out for each one. We've got no one else we can trust
Seth glared at Dean. I shook my head and dragged Seth with me, pulling him out the door so that Roman and Dean could get their heads where they needed to be. One consolation was that Randy would be tagging with them against Bray, Luke and Sheamus. As much as I disliked him, he was a good fighter to have on their side.

**********

Since the hotel room was under Roman's name, I had to wait with Seth until he came to get me. I was jumpy and jittery. The live broadcast had ended before I was able to get to a tv, so I just had to trust that they were ok. Seth took me down to the hotel gym and ordered me to start working out, if only to burn off my excess energy.

"Do you think it will be like this for a while?" I asked him, huffing from the exertion of lifting the barbell. Seth was spotting me, and took a moment to realize what I meant.

"Do I think Bray's going to be going after Roman for a while? And that as a consequence you'll be with me more often? Man, I hope so." I set the barbell back in the metal hooks, punched Seth, then picked it back up. He laughed. "Come on, dollface. I'm not about to complain about hanging out with you more. You're fun to poke at. But, as for Roman, yeah, he's in for some rough times. They're lucky it's only Bray and Luke."

I nodded, grateful that Erick Rowan was not currently in the picture. When Roman came to pick me up later, I was thrilled to see that both he and Dean were both in one piece and jumped on them for hugs.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - August 6, 2015

"Wow, you're really got a house now… It's like you're a real adult," I said as Seth pulled the car into the driveway. Seth had time off from Smackdown, plus his normal time off for the week, and had invited me to visit when he found out. My apartment was really just a place to sleep, so I had accepted. Plus, I missed his family. His mom had been a second mom to all of us when we were the Shield.

"Brat. I forgot you hadn't seen it before… Mom said she'd meet us here, give the place a quick once over before we arrived. She's only doing that since you're visiting. Never does that for just me." He parked and we got out of the car.

"You're here!" Holly, Seth's mom, called out from the porch. Squealing, I ran to her, hugging her fiercely. "Oh! I've missed you!"

"I've missed you, too," I said. I heard Seth chuckling from behind us. "Shut it, Rollins!"

"Oh, don't mind him, dear. He's just jealous. He wishes he could get a welcome like this everytime he comes into a room."

"Well, I mean, if you missed me, sure, but-- Hey!" Seth said. We ignored him as we walked away and went into his house.

"So how long are you staying for?" Holly asked.

"Just a few days. I was planning on going home, but Rollins convinced me that it would be better to
"You call him 'Rollins' now?" she asked.

I blushed. "Oh… yeah… I just… I was more comfortable with it when I was first assigned to be his manager. Now it's kind of just… what I call him." I looked out the window to see Seth struggling with his giant bag. "Sorry…"

"Oh, no! Don't apologize, dear. I know it must have been tough, but you seem to be getting along now," Holly said.

"Yeah, more or less. We argue a lot more than we used to, but… I guess it was to be expected. Considering how he left us, I mean."

"More than understandable. You held him on a pedestal, and now," she looked out the window as well. "Now you see the flaws."

Laughing, I said, "I saw the flaws before, but I was more willing to excuse them. Now I kick his ass to get him to behave better."

Holly grinned. "I'm so glad to hear that."

**********

I made Seth stay in the car for our next outing. Taking a deep breath, I knocked on the door. Small barks came from the other side, and a muffled voice, "I'm coming! Hold your horses, Kev!"

The door opened to reveal Leighla, Seth's ex-fiancée. "Oh! What are you doing here?" she exclaimed and hugged me. Kevin, Seth's beloved Yorkie, was running around our feet. I was supposed to get him and leave, but I hadn't seen Leighla in so long, and I really wanted to just make sure there was no ill feelings between us.

"I'm… I'm visiting! Staying with Rollins," I said, quickly. "I don't know if you've been keeping up, but I was made his manager a little more than four months ago."

She leaned on the door frame. "I had heard a bit. Does she know you're visiting?"

Zahra. "Oh, I actually don't know. He hasn't said one way or another, and I didn't ask."

"Interesting. So… you and Seth… are together?" The way she said it, the way she lifted her eyebrow curiously, I knew exactly what she meant.

My face went red. "No! Not… together together. He's still with… um… her… and I wouldn't…" I hadn't spoken to Leighla at all since Seth's betrayal of the Shield, and certainly not when it came out that he had betrayed her as well, by cheating on her. I had wanted to, but it wasn't my place.

She shrugged. "Kind of figured, but had to ask. He would be so lucky to have a girl like you."

Feeling more than a bit awkward, I said, "I wanted to call you… but I didn't think it was my place to do so…"

"It's fine. Don't worry about it." She looked behind me, to Seth still sitting in the car. "You made him stay in the car?"

"Yeah… I wanted to speak to you without him hovering."
She giggled. "He does have that tendency. Come on in. Make him suffer a bit more." I followed her in, Kevin close on our heels. "So, is he… is he happy? With her?"

"I honestly don't know. I make it a point to not involve myself with that part of his life. It's easier and I'm less likely to kill him."

"Oh?" She poured a cup of coffee for both of us.

"Yeah… I… Back before I worked for FCW, I dated this wrestler… and I know what you must have felt when Rollins…" I trailed off. I felt awkward about the subject. How do you say I know what it feels like to discover the man you loved cheated on you and not bring up hurt feelings? "I ran into him recently. Brought back a few memories. Since I was going to be here anyway, I thought... I just wanted to check on you, see how you're doing."

"I see… I'm sorry you had to know that pain as well," she said softly. "But, I'm doing much better now. I sometimes still have moments of sadness, loss, and my favorite, intense, burning anger, but all in all, it was probably for the best."

"But…" I remembered that they were so in love, and for her to be so calm about it confused me.

"He didn't truly love me, not if he could do that to me," she said, sipping her coffee. "It's something I've been making peace with, am still adjusting to, if I'm being honest, but it helps. He's a screw up, and I'll always love the time we had together, but ultimately… it's better for me. I have to put me first. Just as you have to put yourself first."

"I'm… sorry? I don't understand."

"I know you cared for him, more than a little sister should care for a brother. Oh, don't be embarrassed. I also knew that you'd never do anything. You were, and probably still are, too noble like that. You always put him, Roman, Dean, all of them, before yourself. I bet you don't set aside much time for yourself, that you still haven't really put yourself out there in the dating scene."

"I have… a little…" I protested. "I'm just… not that interested."

"And it's probably because of him," she stressed. "Look, I'm not trying to tell you what to do, this is just some friendly advice. Get out there, try, and don't let your feelings for him dictate your life."

I wanted to argue that she was wrong, that I hadn't done that, but deep down, I knew she was right.

**********

Seth let me use his washing machine while we watched Smackdown that night. Since I came straight to Davenport instead of stopping at home, I had very little clean clothes, and it was a condition of my visit that I be allowed to use it immediately. Kevin was sitting in my lap peacefully when I was surprised to hear Roman challenge Bray to a "family vs family" match.

"He won't let you help, you know," Seth said as I stared at the screen.

"What? Oh, I know. I'll just be in the way, like usual." I leaned back on the couch cushions, absentmindedly scratching behind Kevin's ears.

"You weren't--" I gave him a hard look. "I mean… we wanted you with us."

"Save the pity, I am well aware that I was not always helpful to have around." I suppose it was my talk with Leighla that had me thinking so negatively. I knew she was right, and it was bothering
"Dollface…"

"Don't call me that."

"Dollface, I know it didn't always seem like it, but trust me, we preferred having you around rather than not." Seth put his arm around me and pulled me into a hug. "And… I prefer having you with me rather than worrying about if the Wyatts are going to take you hostage to use against Roman. The three of us may be at odds, but we'll always agree that your safety is paramount."

I lay my head on Seth's chest, enjoying the closeness. He was a screw up and a jerk, but he exuded a confidence that made me feel safe. "Yeah, but even that you argue about. Like, who can protect me best? Here's a thought, how about I protect myself?"

"Eh… but that's no fun," he said, wrinkling his nose.

"Idiot," I muttered, and earned a chuckle from him.

**********

The time spent in Davenport went by quickly. I got to see the Black and Brave Wrestling Academy for the first time, meet Seth's business partner, Marek, and even learn a few techniques along with the kids. I was pretty good at the tumbling part, not so good at the promo parts. We also played video games and took Kevin to the dog park. I sort of wished I could stick around.

"Aren't you glad I got you to come?" Seth asked when we were back at the airport, getting ready to take off for the next show.

"Yeah, but you tell anyone, and I will deny it. As far as anyone is concerned, I was here to make sure you stayed out of trouble."

"Brat."
I was a little out of it as I accompanied Seth to the ring at the beginning of the show. It took me a moment to realize what Seth had said. "Monday night Rollins?" It was cute. "Idiot."

He grinned at me. "Brat." Turning back to the crowd, he continued. "I am the man, but not just the man, I am the man who broke the face that runs the place! Mr. You Can't Seeeeeee Meeeeeee," he sang out. "Your WWE World Heavyweight Champion, the CHAMPION of Champions, Seeeeethhhhh! ROLLINSSSSSSS!"

Booooooo0000!

Seth ignored it as usual. "Now… last week, I--"

You sold out! You sold out! You sold out!

"Oh, dear," I said. I still hated the reminder, but it was getting easier to deal with as time went by. Seth, of course, was not bothered by it at all.

"So what?" he asked them. "We've gone over this."

Booooooo0000!

"I don't think they'll be letting it go anytime soon, Rollins."

"And you?" he asked. I wasn't sure if he was genuinely concerned or not, so I just shrugged. He looked mildly disappointed. "Well, moving on, last week, I came out here and gave John Cena the opportunity of a lifetime! A chance at my championship, just so long as he's willing to put his up as well. But… has anyone heard from John since then? I haven't. Dollface? Have you?" He practically shoved the microphone up my nose and waited for my answer.

I sighed. "Why, no, Rollins. I have not," I said in an overly bored voice. I really hadn't, which was surprising. I made a mental note to get a hold of John once we were backstage again. His girlfriend, Nikki Bella, was probably my best bet at the moment.

"Exactly! Nothing! We have heard nothing from John, and while I know he's at home, in bed, licking his wounds, this really is quite irritating." He put his hand on his hip, as if he was truly upset by the lack of communication. I was half tempted to call his bluff and go find Nikki right then and there. "I mean, he has all this free time, so what's he doing? Trying to resurrect what little of a rap career he had? Jamming out to the new Dr. Dre record? I mean, come on, man, throw me a bone here. Granted, if he's trying to revitalize the rap career… well, he's not so much 'straight outta Compton', so much as he's 'straight outta action'! Get it? Because I destroyed John Cena's career when I destroyed his face!"

I grabbed the microphone out of Seth's hand. "One broken nose does not destroy a career, weirdo. Try again."

He grabbed the microphone back, smiling. "It's just interesting to me that he doesn't want to answer. I mean, if he doesn't want to come to Brooklyn and face me like a man, lose to me like a man, then he might as well just forfeit the match and hand over that title to the rightful true champion, which, of course, is me."
"I find it interesting that you didn't ask me to get in touch with him sooner," I pointed out. "So now who's being a brat?"

He covered the microphone so it didn't pick up his words, "Still you, but it's cute. You're gonna love this next bit."

"I highly doubt it."

"Just you wait," he said. He really was far too pleased with himself as he raised the mic back up. "No matter what happens, I will be walking out of there as the first person to be both the WWE Heavyweight Champion and the United States Champion at the same time!" There was a mix of boos and cheers for that one. "Funny thing is, while John isn't brave enough to show up and answer my challenge, I've been hearing that he's going to be on the next episode of Tough Enough?" The mock perplexity on his face made me want to slap him.

I had completely forgotten about that show, considering Seth didn't have much involvement in it, just that one appearance about a month ago, and I was a little surprised he kept up with it.

"Yeah, which is just further proof that John Cena is not tough enough to hang with me." The crowd booed, but Seth spun it for his own narrative. "Hey, I'm on your side for this one! I wish he was even half the man he says he is, and that he would show up here and--" He stopped suddenly and looked over at timekeeper's booth. I looked over as well, but didn't see anything of particular note. "What? What did you say? Are you serious? For real??"

I looked over again. There was no one talking to him. Lillian and the timekeeper were looking at each other in confusion. "Uh, Rollins?"

"Did you just say… John's here? John Cena is here tonight?!" The crowd mostly cheered. "Oh, wait, he's here via satellite." Boos. "Wait… does that mean…" Seth leaned in like he was whispering, but was still speaking into the microphone. "Does that mean he's going to be showing his face?! John?!" He started looking around. "JOHN?? CAN YOU HEAR ME, JOHN?? JOHN!" Seth pointed up at the screen above the ramp. I turned to look, and saw a photograph of John, his nose bent sideways. Now I was really confused. There was no way John hadn't gotten his nose looked at since Seth had broken it, so why that particular photo?

Then the picture spoke.

I stared at the clearly edited video. "What. The. HELL."

"Shhsh, dollface, John is speaking."

I gave him a look. "Are you stupid? That is not--"

"John, does this mean--"

"Oh my god, that is clearly your mouth and your voice in that RECORDING, Rollins!" I hissed at him.

"Glad to know you can recognize my lips," he said, winking at me. I continued to glare at him, trying to not blush since I had only known because I have spent way too much time looking at his stupid, gorgeous face over the years. "So John…"

I went over to the corner of the ring and sat down with my legs crossed and my arms resting on the bottom rope. Seth was having too much fun with this. It was so annoying. I only half-listened to the rest, about how "John" was going to show up at Tough Enough to be a competitor, that Seth had
knocked "him" down to square one. It would have been funnier if the situation had been reversed.

Then, when Seth started in on Neville and their match from last week with his WWE Heavyweight Championship Open Challenge, Cesaro interrupted. Thankfully. I wasn't sure how much more of this farce I could take.

"Forgive me, Seth," Cesaro said, "but you were just going on and on and on and on…"

"Save the theatrics, Swiss man. What do you want?" Seth asked, clearly annoyed.

"Well, I couldn't help but hear you speak of your open challenge, so I just came out here to let you know, I accept!" He tossed down the microphone and started stripping off his suit.

"Hold on, hold on, hold on! Keep your buttons buttoned and your sunglasses on. Why do you even have those? We're indoors." Cesaro raised an eyebrow at Seth. "Look, that was last week. A one time deal. And besides, what have you done lately to make you think you deserve a shot at my champiosnsh--"

The heavy guitar riff that marked Kevin Owens' entrance interrupted Seth.

"What now?!" he said, his annoyance going up a few notches. I got up to join him and Cesaro in the center of the ring.

"Another contender?" I offered, but only got a glare from Seth.

"Seth, buddy, the word you are looking for is nothing. Cesaro has done nothing to deserve anything except maybe a beating. He may think he deserves something since some idiot printed and distributed those cheap 'Cesaro Section' signs, but I assume that person is deranged. Possibly even dangerous and should be reported to the proper authorities. I, on the other hand, beat John Cena on my first time here. Something neither of you can say. And, correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think I am, Seth, you tapped out to John just two weeks ago. Or am I remembering it wrong? I'm the first to admit when I make a mistake."

"Well, he has a point, at least on the John thing," I said. Another glare. "Sorry, sorry."

"So, if anyone deserves a crack at your title tonight, then I have it on good authority that that person is me!"

Cesaro and Kevin starting bickering. "Now, hold on, the both of you!" Seth shouted. "Am I speaking in a foreign language? Dollface, you understand me right?"

I shrugged. "More or less. Sometimes you don't make any sense even though you're speaking English."

He wrinkled his nose at me. "Brat. My point is, I didn't say anything about defending my championship tonight. You two morons--"

Randy's music hit, causing Seth to throw his hands up in frustration. His mic went flying, though I barely managed to catch it. "Seth…" Randy said, that slow, awful smile spreading across his face. "You just keep going on about the Authority this, the Authority that… well, I have it on my own authority that if anyone deserves a shot at the title, it's me."

Randy dropped his mic and slithered into the ring. I got between him and Seth as Randy tried to playfully touch Seth's title belt, smacking Randy's hand away.
"Hey, hey, hey!" Seth yelled from behind me. "This isn't gonna happen. I don't care what you think, I don't care what the crowd thinks, I don't care what the Authority thinks--"

"Damnit, Rollins! We talked about this!!" I hissed at him.

"The only thing that matters is what I think, and I think none of you is getting a shot at my title, so just get the hell out of my ring!!"

"Oh, really?" Randy asked, smiling his snake smile and getting closer. I pushed him back.

"Don't crowd me, Orton," I growled.

"Don't mess with my manager, Randy," Seth said, grinning at him. I couldn't actually see it, but it was easy enough to hear it in his voice. "She could kick your ass."

"Shut up, Rollins." He was really wearing on my last nerve at the moment. "You're lucky that--"

Hunter's music hit. *It's time to play the gaaaa~mmme!*

"Shit," I said, thankful that no one had a microphone near me. "This isn't good."

"You know," Hunter said. "That's an interesting choice of words, Seth. 'I don't care what the Authority thinks'."

"Nononononono," Seth said, looking over at me.

"I warned you," was all I said.

"That's not what I meant," he said, attempting to explain. "These guys came out here and--"

"Regardless of what you meant, it does give me an idea. See, SummerSlam is just two weeks away and the doctors have informed me that John's chances of attending is fifty-fifty at best. So, tonight, there will be a triple threat match of Cesaro, Kevin Owens, and the Viper, Randy Orton! The winner of which will go on to face the champion, Seth Rollins, in tonight's main event!"

Seth cursed under his breath as the other three men cheered.

"Maybe now you'll start watching what you say," I told him with a heavy sigh, knowing that it was highly unlikely.

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I trailed behind Seth when he went to talk to Hunter. It was not going well.

"Seth, this is just a minor thing," Hunter said. "You need to defend your championship so that you don't get rusty, so that you can prove yourself."

"Look, I understand all that, but at the end of the day, you're still making me defend my championship. And I have proven myself, proved that I'm not a lump of coal crumbling under the pressure."

"Yeah, you're a pretty, pretty diamond, Rollins," I said with a laugh. Hunter chuckled.

"I am, and I sparkle like no one else," Seth said proudly. "My point is--"

"You're building your legacy," Hunter interrupted. Seth tried to say something, but Hunter cut him
off. "And it takes more than beating your opponents at the pay-per-view events to prove that to the WWE Universe. You need to prove it every. Single. Night."

"Well, when you put it that way... John Cena does it every week. Anything he can do, I can do better." Seth was puffed up like a peacock with Hunter patting him on the back, but I was wary. Of course he could do it, there was no question, but there was a matter of would he. Normally, I'd say no, since his drive to fight was mostly limited to defending his title, and he was smart enough to not gamble it like John did.

Hunter clapped Seth on the back, bringing me out of my thoughts. "That's my boy. Go make me proud."

I couldn't quite place the why, but I had a nagging suspicion that that was the last thing Hunter truly wanted.

**********

"So, looks like it's Randy you'll be fighting tonight." We had been watching the triple threat match backstage.

"You don't sound like you're impressed," Seth said.

I sighed. "I'm just… I mean, it's not… No, I guess I'm not. You've had how many matches against him? And when they're for the championship, you're the one who walks away the winner. It can get a little… boring."

Seth slung his arm over my shoulder. "Only you would complain about boring matches."

"You should, too. I know you, Rollins. If you're bored, that means you're gonna get yourself in trouble, and that means more trouble for me. I don't want more trouble. You're plenty."

Seth snorted a laugh and walked away whistling.

**********

"Hey, kiddo, did you see our promo?" Dean asked me. He and Roman hugged me in brother sandwich.

I grinned. "I did. I wish I had known baby Dean, just so I could play lookout for him, make sure he didn't get taken to juvie so often." Dean laughed and hugged me again. Dean had talked about how he hadn't had a lot of friends growing up, how it would have been nice to have someone who could bail him out, and how his first real friend was Roman. Roman, in return, spoke about how Dean is his family, his brother. They both failed to mention how Seth had once been in that group, and how I currently was. I knew it was for my own protection, but damn it, it hurt to be ignored like that. They both spoke about how Luke would do anything for Bray, but would Bray return the favor? My money was on no, he would not. Bray looked out for himself, and his "family" were merely the sheep he guided. If he needed them to become sacrificial lambs, then they would.

"You would have been the best lookout, I bet you anything."

"I'm a little hurt you left me out of the 'family talk' stuff," I said, looking down at the floor.

"You know why we did that, baby girl," Roman said.

"Yeah… I know… doesn't mean I like it, or that it doesn't hurt." Suddenly, I was being lifted up and
over Dean's shoulder. "Oh, god, not again…" I groaned, letting my body relax into dead weight. "I hope I gained weight, you asshole!"

Dean smacked my butt. "Nope! Same as ever. You could stand to gain some weight actually. I'm taking you for donuts."

"Roman…" I whined, reaching for him.

"Not gonna happen, baby girl. We've got a plan. A good one, too. We're going to have a family night. Games, junk food, crappy movies, all that jazz. Got it? And we're going to hang out as much as possible up until SummerSlam. You're going to be so sick of us by the end of it, you won't feel hurt when we have to leave you out of stuff."

I grumbled. "You could have just asked, you know…"

"Where's the fun in that?" Dean asked, making Roman and me laugh.

**********

Don't get me wrong, I love a good fight as much as the next person, but Dean's match against Luke Harper was a bit hard to watch. If it hadn't been for the looming Family vs Family match, I think it would have been a lot easier. Luke picked up the win, after a scuffle between Roman and Bray on the outside caused enough of a distraction for both men in the match.

"Come on, guys… get it together," I whispered softly. "Two weeks until SummerSlam."

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"Shit! Lana! Someone get out there!" one of the crew yelled. I whipped my head around, and ran towards the stage entrance. It didn't take long to learn that Lana had attacked Summer Rae, but at a cost. Rusev and Summer Rae were walking back, laughing and giggling to each other. Rusev kept looking back at the direction of the stage whenever Summer wasn't paying attention, which I found odd. Is he… does he regret what he's doing to Lana? I could think too long on that as Lana was brought backstage.

"Hey, Lana…" I said, taking her from the crew member who was helping her along. "You gonna be ok? I can come with you as backup next time, if you want."

"Noh! I ken handle dose… dose… ruffians!" Lana hissed, then winced. "But… I vill let you knoh."

**********

"Whoa…" I said, doing a double take before it really registered. "Stephen Amell, in the flesh." He was even more handsome in person. I wished I could get his autograph, but security was escorting him out and Hunter was watching him carefully.

"Mmmm, he could jump in my ring whenever he wanted," Paige said, leaning on my shoulder. "Did you see what happened?"

I shook my head. "I was getting lectured by the bosses on Rollins' behavior again." That had been annoying, and Seth had to be reminded that if he didn't stay in line, his privileges would be taken away.

"Well, Stardust attacked Neville after his match with Barrett, then put his hands on Amell, who jumped the barricade and then the ropes, and attacked Stardust. It was kinda hot," she said, fanning
herself. "Now, they have a tag match at SummerSlam. The Red and Green Arrows versus Stardust and Barrett."

"Whoa… now that I have to see!"

**********

"So, are you ready for your rematch with Randy?" I asked.

"He's going down," Seth said. He was upside down, doing his handstand walking across the hallway. "Can you get me some water? I left my water bottle in the locker room. Please."

"Sure."

I went all the way to catering to get a cold one for myself as well.

"Well, well, well, look who it is." I turned to the side to see Randy leaning against some equipment boxes. "Hey, beautiful."

I gave him as sarcastic a smile as possible. "Now what would your girlfriend think of you saying that to me? Probably make you sleep on the couch."

He grinned. "Might be worth it."

I dropped the smile and shook my head. "Whatever it is that you want, Randy, I'm not interested. See you at ringside." I took a few steps only to find my path blocked by him.

"Now, now, it's only polite to hear someone out when they have something to say to you." He touched his finger to my cheek and caressed it gently.

I glared at him and pushed his hand away. "Randall, if you want to be in one piece for your match with Rollins, you'll keep your hands to yourself. I don't like being touched. Say your piece and let me get on with my job."

He drew his hand back, still smiling. "Why do you think Seth keeps you around? It's not because of your managerial skills, though I do think they are wasted on him."

"Does it matter? I have a contract."

Randy nodded. "You do. To be the manager to the champion, not to Seth Rollins. So, hypothetically speaking, you could be free of him, and still keep your job. If you do one little thing…" His smile was as slimy as the rest of him.

"And what's that? Helping you? Not gonna happen."

"I get it, you're loyal to your brothers and I am often at odds with them, but… not always. You and I, I think we could be friends." He reached for my cheek again, but stopped short by an inch when I gave him another glare. Chuckling, he said, "Just think about it, sweetheart. See you ringside."

I didn't tell Seth about my run in with Randy. I didn't want to bother him with it and possibly mess with his head. "What took you so long?" he asked.

"Wanted a cold one." I held up the now partially drunk ice cold bottle of water. "Here's yours." I held out the room temperature bottle, but Seth swiped the cold one before I could stop him. "Hey!!"
"What? I was getting a bit too warm."

"Jerk," I muttered, opening the other one and splashing him with it.

**********

The match started well. A little bit of mind games on Seth's part, hopping in and out of the ring, teasing Randy. He danced around me at one point, before starting the match for real. Seth didn't give Randy an inch, but the Viper is a clever man. He had to be to have gotten this far in the business. He waited for an opening. Seth was sent flying to the turnbuckle, and when he turned back around, Randy sprang his RKO on him. It was out of sheer panic that Seth was able to escape it. I have to admit, his reflexes were on point tonight.

Seth began to get frustrated when he missed a suicide dive, Randy interrupted it by slamming his fist into Seth's face, and then couldn't get the upper hand as Randy made several attempts to powerslam Seth. The fourth attempt was finally successful.

"Come on, Rollins!" I shouted. Randy looked at me in annoyance. "Stop messing around!"

Seth kicked out of the pin at two and a half on the three-count. He rolled towards me, getting under the ropes, but Randy was right after him, pulling him to a standing position by his hair, and then grabbing him for the Vintage DDT. Seth wiggled out of Randy's hold like a cat trying to get it off a bath and escaped to the outside mats.

"Fucking hell," he muttered. "I am out of here…"

"Rollins, don't you dare…" He headed towards the timekeeper's area and grabbed his title. "Damn it, give me that!" I yelled.

"No!" he yelled back. I grabbed one end, Seth held tightly to the other. We were playing tug of war when Seth suddenly lunged forward at me, both of us falling to the ground with him on top of me. "Oh, shit! Dollface! Are you ok?!"

"Owww… yeah, I think so, but I swear to god, I'm gonna kill you if you don't finish this match," I groaned. That was when I noticed Randy. He grabbed Seth by the hair again and pulled him off of me. "Should have known…" I muttered as I got up, the title in my arms, wincing from a pain in my back. I must have landed on some cables or something.

Randy tossed Seth back into the ring. Lillian helped me to a chair, where one of the med team checked me over. Except for the pain in my back, I was fine, but the woman insisted that if I stayed out around the ring, then I was to watch from a safe distance, away from the action. That was fine by me. I wasn't sure I could walk over to the ring on my own power at the moment.

I watched with trepidation as Randy slowly wore down Seth. Seth went for a high risk move, climbing to the top of the ring post, but Randy swept his legs from under him, sending Seth crotch first into the ropes. Seriously, he might never have kids at this point. Randy gave Seth a mere moment to recover, then climbed the ropes to suplex Seth into the mat. Seth was hurting, but so was Randy. That move cost both of them a lot as they went crashing down. Randy was faster to recover, however, but Seth made an attempt to attack that worked, and pushed Randy back. He went for a Pedigree on Randy, who countered it, flipping Seth up and behind him. Seth landed on his feet, damn cat that he is, and tried another move, but got sent outside the ropes instead. He stayed on the apron, but that just gave Randy the opportunity for his Vintage move, pulling Seth back through the ropes. Before Randy could actually perform the move, Seth scrambled out of position and flipped Randy over the top of the ropes, then landed an Enzuguri Kick right to the
side of Randy's head. I could hear the crack of that kick, which sent Randy to his knees on the apron.

Seth was astonished to see the Viper like that, and it took me a moment to realize why. Seth pulled Randy through the ropes and performed the Vintage move. I could hear one of the announcers yelling, "Vintage Rollins!!!" I think it was JBL, but I couldn't be sure. I was too intent on watching Seth.

"Come on… cover him," I whispered. Seth was heaving as he got to his feet. He raised his arms, and I saw what he was doing. He was mimicking Randy, going "to that place," wherever the fuck that was. That just pissed me off. I got to my feet, a little wobbly, and made my way over to the ring. "Stop playing around and cover him, you asshole!" I yelled.

Seth turned to me, a little surprised, but grinned and gave me a wink. He fell to the mat like Randy does, doing that worm-dance thing, then got to his feet and waited, taunting Randy as he got up. Seth kicked him in the stomach as soon as he turned around, and tried for the Pedigree a second time, but Randy tried to counter. Seth was lifted up, but then fell out of it as Randy slipped on the mat. I suppose it was a counter of sorts, but certainly not the one Randy was going for. Seth went for the Pedigree again, but Randy countered it, successfully this time, and Seth was sent over the top rope. Seth ran alongside the ring on the apron, and as soon as Randy turned around, he was leaping up, using the top rope as a springboard… and right into an RKO.

I felt the air leave my lungs like a punch to the gut. "No… No!! Seth!!" I screamed as the referee counted. One. Two.

"SETH!"

It felt like everything had been changed to slow motion. The ref's hand was about to come down for the third time and still no movement from Seth. I was screaming at him, willing him to kick out of the pin. Then Randy was gone. The bell was rung, signalling the end of the match, and I was climbing inside the ring to Seth's side, ignoring the pain in my back. Randy hadn't won, but I had no idea why.

"Seth," I whispered, not liking how he was still not moving. "Seth, wake up! Please! Wake up!" I looked over to Randy, and realized what must have happened. Sheamus was there, kicking the snot out of Randy. He must have pulled Randy out of the ring right before he won, ending the match in a disqualification. "Please, Seth," I said, shaking him as Sheamus sent Randy over the barricade and into the crowd. "Please wake up…"

His eyes fluttered open. "Wha… what happened?"

"I don't think you want to know…" I muttered. My heart was still beating rapidly in my chest. The thought of Seth nearly losing the championship to Randy would definitely be keeping me up tonight. The crowd started to get rowdier, bringing my attention back to the Irishman outside the ring. The Irishman who currently held the Money In The Bank Contract. "Oh, no…" I was pulling Seth up. "We have to go. Right now!"

"What…?" Seth was still out of it. He let me pull his arm over my shoulders so I could help him move better. "You smell nice."

"Thanks. Let's go--"

Sheamus Brogue Kicked Seth right out of my grasp and I shrieked as Seth went down. Sheamus was trying to hand his briefcase to the referee, but I was not having it. I grabbed the briefcase from him and threw it across the ring, as far away from Sheamus as I could. It sailed through the air and landed near the ramp.
"What do ya tink yor doin'?!" Sheamus yelled at me, grabbing my shoulders. I didn't think about what I was doing, I just did it. I jumped up, still being held by Sheamus, and kicked him with both feet right in the stomach. He let go and stumbled backwards into the ropes. I fell to the mat, but I used the inertia to roll backwards, away from him and towards Seth. It wasn't graceful in the least, and it hurt that one spot on my back again, but I was free and safe. For the moment, at least. Sheamus was pissed, but before he could take even one step towards me, Randy appeared out of nowhere and RKO'd him. Not on my behalf, I'm sure, but because if Sheamus was successful, Randy would have to start over again with his quest to regain the title. Also, Randy just hated losing, and since Sheamus made him lose, Sheamus needed to pay.

Neither man was paying attention to us, as I rolled Seth out of the ring. One of the stagehands brought Seth's title from where I had dropped it just outside the ring, and handed it to him. I breathed a sigh of relief as I saw how preoccupied Randy was with Sheamus.

"I'm still champion?" Seth asked. His eyes were glazed over and he was having some trouble breathing.

"Yeah… you got lucky, Seth…" I said, fear taking hold of me. I hugged him tightly, trying to will the bad energy away. "You got extremely lucky."

**********

"Ow, ow, ow, ow!

Roman sighed, "Baby girl, stop being a baby, girl. You strained a muscle. Peaches said it would heal in just a couple of weeks, so long as you do everything he told you to do."

I whimpered a little. "But, but, but… it's so far away…" I reached out for the bowl of M&Ms. It was only a few inches out of my reach.

Roman rolled his eyes, but he was smiling. Dean chuckled and got the bowl for me, curling around me as we all turned our attention back to the tv. True to their word, we were having a family night. Roman had altered his previous statement, and I had been promised that this was just the first of many nights and that they would continue right up until SummerSlam. Currently, we were watching Tough Enough to see what John Cena would be saying in regards to the championship title match. I had bet on him accepting the challenge, Roman said he wouldn't, and Dean said he wouldn't answer the challenge at all.

"Well, I guess that answers that," I said, switching the tv so we could watch Netflix. "Looks like John will be the Rollins' opponent at SummerSlam." After everything that had happened, it felt a little anticlimactic to hear John address it so flippantly, but I couldn't concentrate on that. I had my brothers to worry about, and my… and Seth Rollins to worry about as well.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - August 13, 2015

Seth opened up the show, but I was far from happy with him. He talked about "taming the Viper," and "heroically escaping the sorry excuse for a Mr. Money In The Bank." If we had been alone and not in the middle of the ring, I would have ripped into him for that sort of talk. Did he really not realize how close he came to losing his championship? How close I came to being the manager of Randy or Sheamus?!

"Can you believe he accepted my challenge on an episode of Tough Enough?!" Seth asked the
audience, who didn't seem to see anything wrong with that. I didn't either. "In fact, he didn't accept it, he had Daniel Bryan accept it with that dumb chant of his!"

"For the love of…"

"So you know what? I chal-- No. I dare John to bring that ugly mug of his to Raw next week, and accept my challenge, face to face. Man to man."

"Are you five? Surprised you didn't triple dog dare him." It was all I could do to not slap him in the middle of his gloating when Neville's music hit the speakers, interrupting the delusional rant. "Oh thank god…" I muttered.

"Seth, I think you might have hit your head harder than you realized," Neville said with a smile as he walked down the ramp and into the ring.

"What do you want?" Seth growled. "I don't see any kittens needing a rescue from a tree. Or any cliche damsels in distress. No one called for a superhero!"

"I object," I said. "I was in need of rescue from your idiocy."

Seth glared at me, but Neville chuckled. "Everyone was in need of a rescue, and it apparently takes a superhero to shut you up," he said. The crowd liked that. Seth did not. "I like how you conveniently left out some rather important details. Like despite the fact that you broke John Cena's nose, you still lost." If this was a cartoon, I imagine that Seth's eyes would have burned with fire and steam would have come out of his ears from the anger he displayed. "Or the fact that if Sheamus hadn't interfered, Randy Orton would have won your precious title. I mean, if he had waited just a few more seconds, then cashed in his contract, he could have easily won it off of Randy moments later. Lucky for you, Sheamus isn't that smart."

"He's right, you know," I said quietly to Seth. "We haven't talked about it, but he's right about that match."

Too bad this wasn't a cartoon, Seth's head would have exploded in an eruption. "That's not--"

"You know what your problem is, Seth? You just go on, and on… and--"

"I didn't--"

"AND on… and on, and on--"

"Hey! I'm talk--"

"AND ON. And on. And on."

I couldn't stop my laughter. I swear I tried, but it was just so funny how Seth was trying to be his usual asshole self and Neville was having none of it. Really, it was his dumbfounded reaction that got me going.

"Dollface, will you quit that?!"

"I'm sorry!" I said, trying to stop the giggles.

"You so aren't," he growled. He pulled me close, put his arm around my shoulders, and covered my mouth with his hand. It sort of helped, but not really. "Ok, now that the peanut gallery is quiet," he said, looking down at me, "I--"
Seth looked ready to pummel Neville, which wasn't helping my giggles, when Cesaro's sirens went off. He strutted down the ramp. "He has a point, Seth. Everyone knows it, especially the Cesaro Section. You just go on and--"

Kevin Owens appeared, seemingly out of thin air, and attacked Cesaro from behind, pummelling him with his fists. I heard a scuffle behind me and turned to see Seth attacking Neville, picking him up and throwing him into the turnbuckle. Neville slumped to the floor. "Damn it, Rollins!" I put myself in between him and the now incapacitated Neville. "Don't you dare!"

He smirked at me, but his smile didn't reach his eyes. "I've done what I need to do."

"I'm so sure," I snarled. "Get out of here!"

A flicker of doubt crossed over Seth's face before anger set in. "Fine, but I want a match with him tonight," he said. He left the ring, going backstage with Kevin and allowing me to see to Neville and Cesaro.

"Do it. Make the match," Neville wheezed to me as the medics helped him up. "Cesaro and me, against Kevin and Seth."

"Consider it done," I promised him.

"Wow… that's some shiner," I said, peering at Dean's eye. Roman was off getting some ice. His match against Luke Harper had gone… poorly, to say the least. Roman had technically won, but it was by disqualification when Bray attacked him. Dean had come to his rescue, but it had just gone south from there. They had managed to send the Wyatt Family running, but not without some damage to themselves.

"Harper got lucky. Still beat his ass right out of that ring," Dean looked way to proud of himself. I sighed. "I wish there was something I could do… even if it's just something small…"

"Good luck kisses--"

"Fall under that category," I finished for him with a small smile, "But I want to do more. The fact that I can't help at all out there in the ring is killing me."

Dean looked at me curiously. "You want to help? Like, interfere?"

"What?! No! You know how I feel about that… I mean…" What did I mean? I hated interfering. It just made me a target, and if I couldn't defend myself… well, no, that wasn't quite so true anymore. I would normally say it was because of my principles, but then I pictured myself grabbing Sheamus' briefcase and tossing it out of the ring not even three days prior. That was interfering. That was exactly what I had promised myself I would never do. I hadn't thought about it, I had just done it, just like I had kicked Sheamus to get away from him. Unlike kicking Sheamus, flinging the briefcase away hadn't been to protect myself, it had been to protect Seth and his championship. Would I do the same for my brothers? In my heart, I knew the answer was yes, but my head was screaming NO!! Screaming that I shouldn't have helped Seth like that either. I couldn't give Dean a decent answer. "I don't know," was all I could say.

"Hey, kiddo, we know you got our backs if things go truly FUBAR, so… don't worry too much,
"and just do what you can, ok?" Dean patted my head then pulled me into a hug. "Just stay safe," he whispered softly, his scruff scratching against my cheek and his voice almost tender.

**********

"You're not allowed to listen to this," Kevin informed me. I had just found him and Seth, standing in the hallway for a strategy session. "In fact, I don't think you should standing with us at ringside either."

"Hey now," Seth said. "She's invaluable--"

"To you," Kevin interrupted. "She's an asset to you, but to us, she's a liability. She needs to go."

Seth opened his mouth to protest, but I cut him off, "You don't want me around, Owens? That's fine. I'll leave." I gave him the brightest smile I could, which is pretty darn bright. He smiled, thinking he had won. Foolish mortal, I thought. "I'm just going to go hang out with some friends. Byeeeee," I said, still smiling and ignoring Seth's short lived pleas for me to stay.

**********

It was worth the scowl on Seth's face to see the look of shock on Kevin's as I walked out with Cesaro and Neville. I knew Seth would likely yell at me later, but I had accepted that fact earlier as I walked away from him and Kevin, and went in search of Cesaro and Neville. I promised them I wouldn't do anything to interfere in the match itself, I just wanted to annoy Kevin. Both men had laughed and agreed to let me accompany them. After that, I left them to their strategizing.

Now, out at ringside, I leaned against the apron and waved to Kevin. He was furious. Seth was annoyed, but also kind of smiling. I was fairly certain he knew exactly what I was doing at this point.

The match started, and I made it a point to cheer extra loudly for Cesaro and Neville when Kevin was in the ring. If looks could kill… It amused me greatly. For Seth, I merely made snarky remarks, which earned me smirks from him. It was fun to watch, to poke at both Kevin and Seth. At least Seth looked like he was having fun. I was a little sad when the match ended, with Seth pinning Cesaro after a brutal pedigree.

Kevin was not pleased with how the match ended, for whatever reason, and he hit my shoulder with his as he walked backstage.

"I'm beat," Seth said as we walked to his private locker room. "Where do you want to go for dinner?"

I rolled my eyes. I had told him at least three times already. "I'm going to dinner with Roman, Dean and Rini, remember?"

"But…" Seth frowned. "You were just with them yesterday! And the day before that. And the day before that. And--"

"And you know why," I sighed. "You know exactly why."

Seth threw his towel angrily in the corner. "It's not fair. I thought I'd be hanging out with you all the time because of the whole Wyatts thing, but I rarely see you outside of work now!"

"Rollins?" I asked, raising my eyebrow. "Are you jealous?" It was incredulous. Ludicrous even. Seth looked away. "Oh my god, you are!" I laughed. "But why? You literally get way more time
"Yeah, but not for fun stuff. Just work stuff."

"I went to visit you at home just last week. You had me there for four days. And as much as I told people otherwise, it wasn't because of work."

"It wasn't?"

I rolled my eyes. "You know it wasn't. It was because..." I suddenly felt nervous and a bit shy. "I wanted to hang out with you, too. I missed hanging out with you like that. It's been, what? Over a year since we were properly friends? More than that since I actually visited Iowa for non-work reasons."

"Soooo... We're friends again?"

I made a face at him, making him laugh. "Yeah? I think so? I mean, what do you think?"

He hugged me. "Yeah, we're friends."
"Damn it…" Seth said under his breath. We were watching from backstage as Stephanie and Hunter opened the show with news on SummerSlam. They had just announced who would be hosting.

"Aawwww, is da big, bad Architect scareaed of a wittle tv show host?" I asked in my best baby voice, a huge grin on my face. "Isn't he, like, a foot shorter than you? And got at least twenty years on you?"

"Yeah, but… He has a deceptively sharp kick," Seth growled. He unconsciously rubbed his inner thigh where Jon Stewart had kicked him that time Seth had invited him to appear on Raw when he was still Mr. Money In The Bank. "He better stay out of my business."

I giggled. It was just completely absurd. "I'll make sure of it. I might not run interference while you're in the ring, but outside, I can definitely help."

"Thanks, dollface."

"Don't call me dollface."

**********

My mind wandered as I followed Seth around. He was anxious about something, but refused to talk about it, though he did mumble to himself every so often. I was pretty anxious as well, but likely for a different reason. Ever since my trip to Davenport, something had been weighing on my mind. I wasn't quite sure who to talk to about it, however, which was not helping my anxiety.

I could hear the match from the monitors we passed, Cesaro and Randy were having some trouble against the team of Sheamus and Kevin. The only one in the entire match I was rooting for was Cesaro. He and Seth were talking again, more or less, and since Seth was being a brat and insisting that I ride with him in order to make up for extra time I spent with Roman and Dean, I was hanging around Cesaro a lot more as well. It was doing wonders for my coffee game, to be honest.

I wasn't paying attention and ran into Seth's back. "Ow, my nose…" I said, rubbing it. Seth turned to look at me. "Sorry, didn't mean to run into you. Was thinking." It was then that I noticed where we were.

"It's fine, dollface. If you wanted to give me a hug, you could have just said so." I shoved him as he chuckled. "Ok, let's do this!" he said, then opened the door to Hunter and Stephanie's office. "Hey guys! How you doing, how you been?"

"Seth…” Stephanie nodded to me. I gave her a small, tight smile. "What can we do for you?"

"Oh, just get right to it then…"

Hunter sighed. "We're very busy, Seth, so if you would, just tell us what you need."

Seth took a deep breath, glanced at me, then said, "Well, correct me if I'm wrong, but there's never been a duel Heavyweight Champ and US Champ, right?"
Stephanie frowned. "Well, yes, that is correct. Why do you ask?"

"I was thinking, since it would be a first, that maybe... maybe I could get a statue made? Of myself, I mean." The hopeful sound in his voice made me smile. "It's just... getting this sort of achievement, it's up there with Andre and Rick, don't you think?"

"You want a statue...? Like Andre the Giant and Rick Flair?" Hunter asked dubiously. Seth nodded.

"Well, I mean, he has a point," Stephanie said to Hunter. Hunter shrugged. "Ok! Sure! You get this win, and you get a statue that will sit with the other legendaries."

"Oh, thank you!" Seth exclaimed, his face lighting up like a Christmas tree. "This is definitely the best decision you'll make all night!"

Once we were out of their office, Seth turned to me and asked, "What do you think of my idea?"

"I like how you waited to ask me that after you made the request," I said wryly. "Honestly, I don't think a statue is really the best idea, considering how big your head already is. This kind of achievement would definitely be pushing you towards the legendary status," I said, "but you're not there yet. You might even end up stepping on someone else's toes because of it."

Seth waved me off, smiling. "Bullshit. This is a great idea!" He hadn't lose an ounce of the joy he had gained from hearing Hunter and Stephanie's approval. "You'll see."

**********

Roman had another match against Luke Harper, a rematch from Smackdown last week. Both Dean and Bray were ringside, but it worried me that Bray didn't say anything to any of Dean's taunts. In fact, I don't think Bray heard him at all. His focus was on Roman and only Roman. He didn't even move as Roman got the pin on Luke.

**********

Lana told me to not worry when she went out to the ring. That didn't stop me. She was joining the announcers team for the match of Rusev versus Mark Henry, which I considered a Bad Idea. She just kissed my cheek and said, "Dunt worry! Dunt worry! I have plan. You vill see."

She was not kidding. After the match, she got into the ring, and screamed at Rusev and Summer as they were walking back up the ramp, calling out Summer to face her, woman to woman. She slapped Summer so hard, I was surprised Summer stayed conscious. Then she called Rusev into the ring and stared him down, taunting him. I was ready to take off, run down that ramp and provide backup support, but then... I smiled as Dolph showed up and super kicked Rusev into next week.

"So... I was thinking that... Maybe I should go out on more dates..." I said softly as I was watched Dolph and Lana on the screen. Their reunion was sweet and damn it, I wanted something like that. It didn't help that Leighla's words from a few weeks ago were also still in my head.

"Do you really want to?" Roman asked me. We were watching the show together, though Roman hadn't really been paying attention. He was holding an ice pack to his elbow. Dean had been with us, but had wandered off to find something to eat. I don't know what made me decide to voice my thoughts out loud to Roman, but now that I had, I couldn't just stop at that.
“Sometimes… But then I realize the only good guys I know are my brothers, so, you know, that’s weird. Plus I don’t really meet a lot of people outside of wrestlers. Maybe the announcers, but the only one remotely interesting is Tom, and he’s unavailable. Maybe Byron, if he wasn’t so weird about stuff.”

Roman laughed. “Fair enough. Though you did sort of paint yourself into a corner with the no wrestlers policy, considering your life. But didn’t you mention that there was a guy who asked you out back home?”

I had. He was the son of the local pastor, and was in seminary to become a pastor himself. He was nice, handsome, but a bit bland compared to the guys I knew from work, plus I'm not particularly religious. With Seth being an atheist, Roman being a Catholic and Dean being… Dean, I usually wasn't that concerned about it, but it occurred to me that Richard might be, which caused my original hesitation to say yes to him.

Besides that, the only thing interesting I knew about him was his name. “Yeah, Richard Prince.” Once he became ordained, he would be called Reverend Richard, or possibly Pastor Prince, and that amused me. "You think I should accept his offer to take me out?"

Roman shrugged. “Why not? What's the worst that could happen? He proves your point and you go back to where you were before?”

He had me there. "Yeah, I guess. I'll give him a call later." Roman gave me a look. "Or now, I can call him now."

**********

Standing in the ring, I fixed the items on the table as Hunter and Stephanie looked on. I had been told to change into something more "professional", but I kept the combat boots on. The contract was in the middle, two pens on either side, with a chair on each side as well. Hunter cleared his throat to signal to me, and I handed him the vinyl folder holding the contract as Stephanie began to speak.

"Welcome ladies and gentlemen! To the contract signing for the show stealing match of SummerSlam, a Winner Takes All, Title Versus Title match!" she said.

"Without further ado," Hunter said, swinging his arm towards the entrance ramp, the contract folder in his hand, "I give you, the WWE Heavyweight Champion! Sseeeethhhhhhh! Rollllllllll-innnnnnnns!"

The boos were near deafening as Seth's music began to play and he came out from backstage. It was really odd to see Stephanie and Hunter watching him like proud parents. Even more strange to see Seth act like the proud son. He congratulated them on putting together a great card for SummerSlam, "the greatest of all time." Only time would tell for that one, I thought, but I really did believe it would be a good event.

Then he congratulated himself on the statue that would be built when he beat John Cena at SummerSlam. I bowed my head and bit the inside of my cheek to keep from saying anything. Counting your chickens before they're hatched. This is not good. Seth gave me a questioning look, but I shook my head and mouthed, "Later." He gave me a slight nod.

Lastly, he congratulated the crowd, because once SummerSlam arrived, they were going to be witnesses to the "greatest moment in WWE history". I grimaced and actually hoped that John would come out to interrupt Seth. What can I say? I was annoyed at his arrogance.
Seth went to the table, opened the contract folder and pulled the pen out to sign, but then hesitated and put it down again.

"Something wrong, Rollins?" I asked, looking over to Hunter and Stephanie, who were talking in low voices to each other and not really paying much attention to anyone else.

"Yeah. Listen to them," he said, the twitch under his eye making an appearance.

I turned my attention to the crowd and realized what he meant. Slowly, but surely, they were getting louder with their chants.

Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks!

Half of the crowd was chanting for Cena, the other half was chanting against. And none of them were even mentioning Seth. "I see what you mean."

"After everything I do, and they still don't even give me the courtesy… John isn't even in the ring right now!" Seth glared at the crowd.

"I know. It sucks." It really did suck. As much as I tease and taunt Seth, he didn't deserve to be ignored like this. "So what are you going to do about it?"

"Oh, I'll show you." He grabbed the microphone on the table. "You know, as you guys chant… I am reminded of a song, by a songwriter you may know, a hometown boy named Bob Dylan." The crowd cheered for that. "And the line I'm thinking of goes, 'the times, they are a-changing.' Which is apropos. John Cena has been at the top of this company for the past ten years. And… you know what? I'm just gonna say what we all already know. For the past decade, John has held others back. He has run over and buried the new talent that has come into WWE. He stands atop the mountain of our industry, and whenever anyone comes along to try and take that position from him, he makes sure that they never stand a chance. And John… oh ho ho… You have this tendency of portraying yourself as the superhero, the good guy, but John… I've got news for you. You are not the hero here. You keep the rest of the locker room from being the best they can be, meaning you're the villain."

I smiled a little at that, because the people in the crowd who had been chanting Cena sucks! were now cheering for Seth, even doing the Yes! chant as he stood in the middle of the ring. I didn't necessarily agree with Seth about John holding the WWE Universe hostage, but he was playing the audience like a maestro and it was nice to hear them cheer for him for once. He may be a jerk, but he was a hardworking jerk who deserved credit at least some of the time.

"I think they liked that," he said to me. I gave him a half-hearted shrug, but I smiled. "You guys are gonna loooooove this next part. John Cena is a virus, and he has been infecting this company from top to bottom. And with one knee to his face, I started the vaccination process. I broke his face into a million pieces and I sent him tumbling down the mountain from atop which he stood."

Such a drama queen with the exaggerations, I thought with an amused sigh.

"And John Cena had the nerve, the nerve, to call my title reign a joke?!" There was a dangerous look in Seth's eye that made me shiver a bit.

I had only seen that look once before, and it hadn't ended well. Turning away to focus on the unsigned contract, I tried to get a full breath, but it was difficult. Breathe. It's over. That happened a long time ago. Just breathe…

"He isn't man enough to answer my challenge to my face, but he calls me the joke? I'll tell you,
right here, right now, he isn't good enough to lick my boots! John Cena is. A. Virus. And I am the cure! When we meet at SummerSlam, I will break his legacy like I broke his face, and there's no one who can stop me!

John's music played at that moment. He appeared at the top of the ramp, looking as proud as a peacock, holding one of those towels he always carries that said his motto, "Never Give Up." Tossing it to a kid in the crowd, he ran down the ramp, stopping short at the ring and cautiously entered the ring by climbing the steel steps and going through the ropes. Seth had pulled me to his side, but stood with his arms crossed as he watched John strut around the ring, showing off for the audience.

"I can't wait until this is over," I whispered to Seth.

"Same here. I've got better things to do than watch him be an asshole."

"Like watch yourself be an asshole?" I asked with a small grin.

"Brat."

John grabbed the microphone, "Forgive me for not sitting, but I'm not in the mood to do so." He looked around the arena at the crowd that had begun chanting again. Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! He squared up against Seth from across the table. "You have the audacity to talk about your title reign, to defend it, when half of this crowd is chanting 'Let's go, Cena,' and the other half is chanting, 'Cena suck,' but not a single one of these people is saying a damn thing about Seth Rollins."

My hand immediately went to Seth's arm. "Don't fall for his taunts," I whispered.

"Who do you think I am?" he angrily whispered back.

"I know you, Rollins. I'm not saying don't get mad, I'm saying… just save the anger for later." He huffed, but didn't respond.

"The sad part is that you don't even believe your own hype!" John continued. "The champ… !!!"

"Is HERE!" the crowd finished for him.

John shook his head. The smile on his face didn't reach his eyes. "Is right there," he said quietly, pointing at Seth. My eyes narrowed. I didn't trust John. Seth, on the other hand, grinned. "But the man behind the title is a sorry excuse for a human being, someone who has been reduced to a pale imitation of John Cena."

"Jacked up jock say what?" I hissed. "Rollins is no imitation, John." John glanced at me and snorted his disbelief. That just irked me more. Seth's hand went to the small of my back, grabbing the fabric so that I couldn't jump over the table and possibly attack John. At least he took me seriously, because believe me, it had crossed my mind.

John turned back to Seth. "You are sooo original with your 'Never Shuts Up' and 'You Can't See Knee'," he said, sarcasm dripping from his voice. "You were handpicked by Triple H, a man who doesn't make such a huge decision lightly, and what do you do with that honor? You make jokes, strut around like you own this place, like you are owed by this place. You've been given everything, every advantage, just handed to you on a silver platter, even snagging one of the best managers in the business. And yet... it's wasted on you." My nails dug hard into the palm of my hand, possibly drawing blood, but I didn't care. "You are meant to carry on his legacy, but like him, you won't succeed. And I will tell you why. Because you have the same bright orange problem that
is not going anywhere! Because you don't have what it takes to go toe to toe with me, and because…" His voice dropped a little right before he shouted, "The real. Champ. Is. HEEEERRRRREEEEE!"

I gritted my teeth and attempted to calm down. Beside me, Seth wasn't doing so well either.

Once the crowd settled down, John continued. "And as long as I am here, I will continue to strive to be my very best, while you can't seem to get over your own ego long enough to actually make that title mean something."

I surprised everyone when I slammed my hands on the table. "How dare you! Maybe if you got your head out of your ass long enough, you would see that Rollins is one of the hardest working people in this company! He does everything that is asked of him, signings, meet and greets, promotional, interviews, corporate work, charity work and still has to deal with his own daily activities! Sure, he's being a complete jerk about your match with him, but don't you dare fucking say he hasn't made the title mean something!" I tried to jump over the table, but Seth caught me before I could.

"Whoa, calm down there, dollface," Seth said, pulling me back a little, his arms around my waist. "This is a PG show."

"No! Not until he takes back what he said!" I struggled against Seth's grip on me, but his stupid strength was too much for me.

"I apologize for upsetting you," John said to me, "but nothing in this world will make me say otherwise. Because two weeks ago, Seth, you broke my nose and while I had to sit at home, you came into this ring and droned on and on about how you ended my career? That's fine. That's fiiiiiinnnne," he said, meaning it was very much not fine. "And then last week… oh ho, last week, I have to sit at home because the doctors and the Authority forced me to. I had to listen to them say I 'might not make it to SummerSlam.' But that was fine, too. Because it gave me another week to think. To plan. How, oh how, would I get payback on Seth Rollins and his knee? Which got me thinking… You broke my nose, so maybe I'll break your knee."

I gasped a little at that. And he calls himself a hero? I thought. As much as Seth claimed to have done it on purpose, it was obviously an accident, but this… this was just premeditated cruelty. Worst. Hero. Ever. I wasn't sure what was worse, John threatening extreme physical violence on Seth, or the fact that the crowd seemed to want to see that.

"Or… Maybe I'll break your arm. Or maybe, just maybe, I'll simply break your nose." The crowd loved that one. Then John smiled. He fucking smiled. "But truthfully, the best payback will be simple. See, those are just injuries. People can come back from injuries. What I'm going to do to you… well, son, it will be so much worse. See this shirt?" He pointed at the shirt he was currently wearing. It was a migraine, if you asked me. Bright orange, with an image of John running and wearing the same shirt in that image, imprinted in white, black and bright green, the words Never Give Up on the front, and on the back, You Can't See Me, along with 15x in huge font underneath that, for the fifteen times he had been WWE World Heavyweight Champion. At least Seth's mockery of a shirt was easier on the eyes, but little kids loved John's. "What I'm going to do to you on Sunday is going to haunt you, and you Hunter. See, I designed this stuff months ago, thinking that I'd never be let anywhere near that title again, at least not until Captain Morgan opened his big, fat, stupid mouth!"

My jaw dropped a little. I couldn't believe what I was hearing. He had been begging for the match, had actually earned the chance, and now that he had it, he blamed it on Seth?! That made zero sense! As if Seth had made a mistake by challenging John?? Hunter and Stephanie had given their
seal of approval on the match, otherwise we would not be standing at a contract signing right at that very moment, and he was throwing it back in all of our faces!

"So this Sunday, when you lose, Seth, you also lose, Triple H, because payback for me is just me doing what I do. I win! I win and I become a sixteen time champion, something only held by your mentor," he said, turning to Hunter. The crowd began to Woo. "That's right, Rick Flair. The Nature Boy. The man that passed his legacy to you. This Sunday, I will prove you wrong, Seth. You're not the future, you're a footnote. You will only ever be the answer to the trivia question, Who did John Cena beat to become the sixteen time world champ?"

I growled. "You son of a--" Seth clamped a hand over my mouth. I shook it off, but kept silent.

"It's starting to sink in, isn't it? The pressure?" John asked, with a mock look of concern on his face. "You have the past, the present, and the future riding on your shoulders. The weight of Triple H's legacy. Bestowed upon him, as he is trying to bestow it upon you, but there is one difference between you and him." John turned the contract on the table towards him and uncapped the pen. "That difference is, Triple H was never Rick Flair's bitch."

My jaw dropped all the way open as John signed the contract. Did he really just say that?!

We all just stood there in shock as his music played at he left the ring.

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"He's right, you know," Hunter said once we were all backstage again. "You lose and…" He didn't finish that sentence.

"I won't lose," Seth insisted. "I won't."

"You better not," was all Hunter said before he and Stephanie walked off.

"I won't lose," Seth whispered. His hands were balled up into tight fists. "I won't."

"Seth…” I held his fist in my hands. "Hey… I'm here. I'm right here. Talk to me."

His jaw was tightly set. "I won't lose… Right? I'm not… I'm not just a footnote in the history of John Cena… am I?"

"You…” I whispered, pulling him into a hug he didn't return. "You can beat him. You will beat him. You are not a footnote."

He nodded, but he didn't look like he quite believed me.

We left the arena soon after that. Later, when I spoke to Roman and Dean, I learned that Paul had come out to the ring to address Brock's hometown, and when Brock made his appearance, Paul had sung to him. Sung a hymn. Glory, glory, hallelujah. I hoped Paul knew what he was doing. It was little surprise to hear that the Undertaker had shown up to ruin the homecoming, and had kicked Brock in the balls, Chokeslammed him, and then gave him a Tombstone Piledriver. I felt zero sympathy for the man.

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Smackdown - August 20, 2015
"Ok, see you soon. I'll give you a call when my plane lands," I said into my phone before disconnecting the call.

"Who was that?" Seth asked.

"Kane. He's doing well in his recovery. Hopes to come back in a few months."

"You still talk to that loser?"

I slapped Seth across the face faster than he could dodge. Honestly, I don't think he thought I would do that. "Say that again, I dare you."

"Fucking hell! That hurt!" He looked around at the people around us. No one seemed to give us a second glance. We were standing in the middle of the airport, getting ready to board our respective flights. Seth wasn't scheduled to attend Smackdown that evening, so I was leaving, too. "What was that for?"

"You know Kane is my friend. So don't talk about him like that."

Seth pouted. "I'm your friend, too."

"If it makes you feel better, I was ready to do the same to John on Monday."

"Yeah, I know. I guess it does make me feel a little better," he said, rubbing his cheek. "What did you mean, you'll give him a call when your plane lands?"

"I'm going to go visit him for my days off."

"WHAT?! WHY?!" Now people were starting to stare.

I rolled my eyes. "What did I just say? Kane is my friend. My friend who's currently recovering at home because my other friend didn't trust him, and even stomped him on his injured ankle. I go visit him sometimes, though we talk on the phone more often. Frankly, I should make you come with me and do chores for him as an apology."

Seth balked at that. "No fucking way! I'm not going anywhere near him!"

"I didn't think you would, but that's ok. I don't want to deal with you pouting and making fun of Kane. I'll see you in a few days."

"Are you staying with him? At his house?" Seth demanded.

I raised an eyebrow at him. "No. At a hotel nearby. Why?"

Seth bit his lip.

"What?" I asked.

"Nothing. Never mind. See you on Sunday."
"Wow, that's some getup," I said, eyeing Seth's SummerSlam outfit. It was a white version of his normal black and gold. Even his wrist wraps were white with a gold imprint, though the stitching and ties were black. "You look like the White Power Ranger."

"And?"

I shrugged, knowing Seth was fishing for a compliment. Seth scowled at me and went back to getting ready. "You settle things with Jon Stewart yet? I saw him hanging around earlier. Might be a good idea to clear the air between you two before your match." I had enjoyed watching Seth have his ass handed to him at the time. Seth had invited Jon to Raw and then "took over" the Daily Show in the ring. It had been a low blow, but it had justly deserved and hilarious. Just another attempt to make sure he was never able to sire children.

"No," Seth growled. "But I saw him. He was talking to Cena. Got an intern to go snoop. Jerk was offering Cena help if the need should arise. He's just looking for a reason to see me lose my championship. I'm gonna have to be on the lookout for him." I hummed my agreement.

"I haven't seen his schedule at all, but I think he'll be too wrapped up in hosting duties, whatever that consists of, to bother you. I'll be on the lookout as well, however."

Seth nodded. "You ok to join me ringside? Your back muscles ok?"

"Yeah, I got the all clear earlier today. It's still a little tender, but the pain is pretty much gone now." Seth was tying on his wrist wraps when I brought up a topic that had been weighing on my mind. "So... I'm going out with this guy next week when I go home," I said.

Seth froze. "Really?!!"

I laughed nervously, but his reaction was pretty much mine as well. "Yeah, I know, it's weird, right?"

"A bit... when was the last time you went out on a date?" He turned away from me to check himself in the mirror.

"It's been awhile," I said softly. "Got any advice?"

"Eh... been a while since I had a first date, too, but I guess... don't let him talk you into sleeping with him. Or make out with him. Actually, no kissing until the third date. No sex until at least three months. You're a classy girl, so make him work for it."

I laughed. Roman and Dean had said similar things, though Dean had told me to wait a whole year. Then I noticed then that Seth was tense. "Hey, you alright?"

"Yeah, I'm fine... just... I guess I'm nervous." He pulled his hair back into a tight bun, more harshly than normal, and snapped the hair tie. "Fuck..."

"Come here, weirdo, and sit down." He glared at me, but did as he was told. I grabbed another hair tie and stood behind him. "You are going to do great, I promise. You are going to beat John, take the US Championship, and become the first person to ever hold both titles," I said, running my
fingers through his hair, massaging his scalp to help calm him. He hummed appreciatively. "I know you can do this, just keep your head in the fight and don't let him get under your skin, into your mind. John is not as good as you, but he believes he is, and that can make a difference. I believe in you. And, if you should lose… you have to… um… let me think of a good penalty…"

"I can take you… on a practice date," he said, hesitant.

I froze. "I'm sorry, what?"

"My penalty, I have to take you on a practice date. Someplace fancy and--"

"No." My cheeks were burning with embarrassment.

"Why not?" he asked, leaning back to look up at me. I pushed his head so that he was looking forward.

"Because I said no. I'll think of something if you do lose, ok?" Truthfully, I just hated that a date with me, even a practice one, was something he saw as a penalty, a punishment. As soon as I was done putting his hair in a bun, I left the room without a word, trying to not cry.

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"You ok, kiddo?" Dean asked me when he found me later. I was sitting in a corner of catering, trying to look busy.

"Yeah, just… something stupid Rollins said. Got me all weepy. Don't mind me, and don't go after him. He didn't realize, and I'd rather he not know about this."

Dean scoffed. "Fine. Whatever. You're lucky I need to save my energy for the swamp folk. But personally, I think you should just tell him. Yell at him, hit him, whatever you need." He pulled his chair right up next to mine and put his arm across my shoulders protectively. "You shouldn't be alone though."

"I'm fine. I just--"

"No, not about that emotional crap. I don't want you getting kidnapped by a Wyatt, brainwashed, and then I have to rescue you from some backwoods outhouse before you birth dumpty twins to Harper."

"That… is… very specific," I said, raising my eyebrow at Dean.

He shrugged. "I may have had a nightmare about it last night."

Giggling, I hugged him and said, "You could have just said so. Ok, I promise, if I get kidnapped, I'll make sure to give 'em hell long enough for you to rescue me."

"Atta girl."

**********

Dean escorted me to where Roman was meditating before their match. I hugged both of them tightly and kissed their cheeks. "You will win," I said. "You will take everything they throw at you, and you will survive it, you will get past it. And yes, I'm saying this more for my own peace of mind than yours."

Roman ruffled my hair. "Just stay back here, ok? Where's Seth?"
I shrugged.

"He's stalking the hallways for some reason," Dean said unhelpfully. "Oh, speak of the devil. Traitor! Come get this lost puppy." I smacked Dean, but he just laughed. "Protect her at all costs, or else I'll make sure Cena gets what he wants." His tone suggested he was only joking, but the gleam in his eyes spoke otherwise.

Seth growled at Dean, but grabbed my hand and led me away from my brothers. Once we were in the safety of his private locker room, I busied myself with setting up the monitor (that was already set up). Seth stayed quiet as we watched the match. Dean and Luke started it off, throwing punches and flying across the ring, but it devolved fairly quickly. At one point, Roman sent Bray into the timekeeper's area and then Dean ran across the three announce tables to land a Flying Crossbody into Bray, who went from the timekeeper's area to outside the barricades. But then the tables turned, and Luke and Bray sent Roman careening over the announce table, out like a light.

Dean was on his own against the Wyatts.

"Don't even think about it," I heard beside me.

"I wasn't--"

"You were. You make one move towards that door, and I will duct tape you to the couch," Seth swore.

I bit my lip. Bray and Luke were switching back and forth, tormenting Dean, while Roman was still out of commission. "Take me to the stage entrance."

"Fuck no."

"Not to… I won't get in the way! I swear! I just want to… I want to be there when the match ends. I want to be the first person they see when they're done."


"Please…” I begged, "You can hold my wrist, make sure I stay in the back. I just want to be there for them."

Seth growled a little. Roman had crawled back to their corner, and was leaning on the ropes, holding his hand out to Dean. *Fine. My match is next anyway. But the moment the Wyatts make an appearance, you get behind me, got it?*"

I nodded. Seth grabbed my hand and we headed out to gorilla. Almost immediately upon arriving, Seth shoved me behind him. Luke didn't give either of us a second glance as they passed by, but Bray… he stared hard at me. He didn't say anything, and I let go of the breath I hadn't realized I was holding once he was out of sight.

Roman and Dean were all smiles as they appeared, and accepted the jumping hug I attacked them with. While I hadn't seen the end of the match, it was easy to see that they had won.

"You're supposed to be in hiding, kiddo," Dean said, ruffling my hair. I swatted his hand.

"Don't blame her, blame whoever scheduled my match after yours," Seth said in a bored tone. "She's accompanying me, so unless we were late, she was going to cross paths with those psychos."
"Whatever," Dean said, narrowing his eyes at Seth. He turned back to me. "We'll wait for you after the show. Get some grub. Ok?"

I looked over to Seth, who shrugged.

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"Thank you," I replied, standing awkwardly next to Seth as we waited in gorilla, a little ways away from the crew. Roman and Dean were gone, probably changing in the locker room already. Jon Stewart was chatting with Hunter in the corner over something host related. Everyone else was going about their business, ignoring us. The video package for Seth's and John's match had just started, and John was going to go out first, so we were going to be waiting a bit. "For letting me come over here."

"You're welcome. And… I'm sorry."

I froze, then turned my head to look at him in shock. "Say what?"

He looked uncomfortable. "Whatever I said that upset you. I'm sorry."

"Jeez, you're apologizing but you don't even know why I'm upset?" I asked, rubbing the bridge of my nose.

"I just don't want there to be bad energy between us. I can't focus on the match when I'm worried about you," he said. "So, I'm apologizing. And I do mean it. I am sorry about upsetting you, even if I don't know what I said that did it."

I snorted softly. "You're never going to learn like that."

"Then tell me. Explain to me what I did wrong." He turned to face me. I found it amusing that he and Dean had given me the same advice. "Well?"

I sighed and rolled my eyes. "So, Rollins, I lost a bet and now I have to take you out to dinner as a penalty."

"Hey now, that's not very ni--"

"Someplace fancy," I stressed.

"Oh. Oh!" he exclaimed, the circuit connecting in his brain. "Why didn't you say something?"

"I was mortified, you jackass!" I hissed. "I can't think of anyone who would want to be taken out to dinner as a penalty! Unless it was something they had suggested in the first place."

"Well, ok, it wasn't the best-- Wait. So you'll let me take you on a practice date as long as it's not an imposed penalty?"

I was ready to shove him into a tank full of sharks. "Really? That's what you're learning from this?"

"Well, yeah, but also to not imply that going on a date with you is a punishment."

I was a little surprised. I guess he does pay attention sometimes.

"It's not, you know," he mumbled. "A punishment, I mean. I… I kind of…" He sighed dramatically. "I miss going out with you like that. We used to do it all the time and now… not so
much. I'm lucky if I get you to have dinner with me through a fast food window. So when you mentioned that you were going to go on a first date, and then that I would receive a penalty if I lost, I jumped at the chance to…" He looked even more uncomfortable. "Sorry. I just got ahead of myself. Didn't think it through."

I smiled. I had missed those "dates", too. Most had included Dean and Roman, and were usually at some family restaurant, nothing fancy at all, but I missed it all the same. We had been close, and we were becoming close again, but it wasn't the same kind of closeness. I liked what we had now, but I would be lying if I said I didn't miss parts of our old relationship.

"Tell you what, I win and I'm taking you out to dinner," he declared. "Super fancy dinner, you're gonna have to dress up. Heels, evening dress, do your hair up, the whole works. We can do a spa day together. If I lose, you take me out, as a consolation prize to me, anyplace you want. How's that sound?"

"You idiot," I said, but I hugged Seth tightly and gave him a lingering good luck kiss. "You can do this. You can beat John, just don't let your arrogance get in the way. You look great in that getup, by the way."

"Finally! Thought I was losing my touch."**********

I felt much lighter as we walked towards the ring. Seth was in match-mode, and John looked like he had swallowed a bunch of tacks. Seth held the ropes open for me and Lillian began her introduction of both men. I was happy to hear more cheers for Seth, but more than a few of those people were probably cheering because of who he was facing. It didn't matter. It was nice to hear Let's go, Rollins! in between Let's go, Cena! Seth waited until Lillian announced him, and held his title high above his head before handing it over to the referee. He pulled off his top and handed it to me. "See you on the other side, dollface."

"Don't call me dollface. Go get 'em, champ," I said with a half-smile. Seth nodded, smirking as I left the ring.

Seth and John started with a quick lockup, but broke it almost immediately, circling each other. The crowd started to chant Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! I frowned at that.

"C'mon, Rollins!" I shouted from my place next to the ring.

Seth and John went back into a lockup, but John knocked Seth off his center and was able to flip him to the mat in a takedown. He had a good hold on Seth's neck, pinning him to the mat rather effectively, though not in any way that counted to a win. And a little ridiculously, too, since one of Seth's legs was up in the air for some reason, possibly for balance. The crowd behind me began to change their chant.

"Let's go, Rollins! Clap, clap, clap clap clap! Let's go, Rollins! Clap, clap, clap clap clap!" I frowned at that.

"Let's go, Rollins!" I shouted, thumping my hands on the apron in time to the clapping. "Let's go, Rollins!"

I swear I saw him smile a little, but he was getting up, John's arm still around his neck. The chanting got a little louder as Seth fought to get out of the hold. Seth demonstrated his ring awareness as he blindly pushed John towards the ropes, bouncing him off of them to escape. John kept going towards the other side of the ring, purposely bouncing off of them for momentum. Seth
ducked down to dodge John's attack, John kept going back to the first side of ropes to bounce again, but Seth was waiting, jumped over him and flipped John to the mat in an arm drag. John got up almost immediately, but Seth was ready and delivered a drop kick right to John's chest.

"Yeah! Nicely done, Rollins!" I shouted, clapping for him. Definitely saw him smile that time. Then he taunted John with the hand-waving in front of the face and saying, You can't see me! I rolled my eyes. Predictably, it gave John just enough time, and motivation, to push back and not even five seconds later, Seth was back in the neck hold. "It's like he doesn't listen to me at all," I said with a sigh. "C'mon, Rollins! Get with it!!"

He made a face. Whether it was at me or at the situation, or both, I wasn't sure, but he struggled when John pulled him up to a standing position and then slammed him down, changing the neck hold to a half-Nelson. I could easily hear the frustrated noises he was making.

"C'mon…" I said softly, staring intently at them. "Wait for your opening…"

Seth slowly got both him and John to a standing position, though John was trying to force Seth back to his knees, and as soon as he felt John's grip slip, he delivered lightning punches to John's gut, making him break the hold. John instinctively held up his arms as Seth began to rain down blows to his torso and head, forcing him into the corner. He's protecting his nose, I realized. I couldn't blame John. A broken nose was incredibly painful, and he had already suffered one not even a month ago.

Seth whipped him out of the corner, but John turned around, his hand still on Seth's, and whipped Seth into the opposite corner. His back hit the turnbuckle with a loud smack.

I frowned at John as he looked around the arena, his focus everywhere but where it should be. And that will how you lose your title, John. I smiled, just a little.

He switched his focus back to Seth, who had jumped to stand in the middle rope. As John charged forward, Seth jumped, flipped, and caught John in a Blockbuster, knocking him to the ground. John shakily got to his feet, but Seth was already bouncing off the ropes to deliver a knee to his spine, pushing him through the opposite ropes and out of the ring. I held my breath as Seth took a running start, bounced off the ropes again, took a suicide dive right at John, and then got up and back into the ring to do it another suicide. The crowd was eating it up and went wild as Seth called for it one more time.

Jumping back into the ring, he bounced off of two sets of ropes to gain extra momentum, then took a flying leap over the ropes to land on John. It was easy to see his adrenaline was at a high as he rolled to the side and gave an excited scream. "Come on, John! Let's go!" he said as he stood over his opponent.

John shook his head to clear it and slowly got to his feet. Seth, however, didn't want to wait, and grabbed John, pulling him up and tossing him into the ring. Seth rolled in after him, but John had the momentum and bounced off the ropes. He tried to get Seth with a Clothesline, Seth ducked under John's arm, John bounced off the opposite ropes, and hit Seth with a shoulder tackle, knocking him to the ground. Seth got up almost immediately only to be hit with a second shoulder tackle. He got up from that one as well and took a swing at John, who ducked under, caught Seth and tried for a power slam, but Seth escaped it at the last second with an arm drag, using John's own momentum against him. John got up in time for a Slingblade from Seth, who went for the pin right after, but John kicked out on two.

I was pleasantly surprised to see amusement on Seth's face, instead of the usual frustration. He's having fun, I thought, smiling. As it should be. He does his best at these times.
Seth got up before John, and watched him stagger to his feet in the corner, then ran to the opposite corner to get a running start, but when he charged at John, John had enough presence of mind to block Seth and send him over the ropes. Seth landed nimbly on the apron and jumped to the top rope, aiming for an elbow to John's head, but John dodged and caught Seth's foot, trying to get him into the STF hold. Seth wiggled like a cat escaping a hug and grabbed the ropes, I suppose hoping for leverage to help him get away from John, but John pulled on Seth's legs, bringing him to a precarious standing position, then grabbed him and lifted him into the air, slamming him hard into the mat. I winced from the volume of that splat.

John was still looking everywhere but at Seth. He held his hand aloft, bent at the waist to tower over Seth and waved his hand in front of his face, the prerequisite for his Five Knuckle Shuffle. "You can't see me--" Seth kicked him right between the shoulder and neck, sending John backward into the ropes and allowing Seth the space he needed to get up. As John's inertia brought him back towards Seth, Seth kicked him in the stomach for the Pedigree. John reversed it, sending Seth careening up and over him, though he did land on his feet like the cat he is. He swung at John, who ducked under again, and jumped off the ropes for a Springboard Stunner. It was a bit of a miss, but it was enough to send Seth hard to the mat. John went for the Five Knuckle Shuffle again, this one connecting to Seth's head. They both got to their feet, though Seth was a bit slower and more shaky than John, and John scooped him up for the AA, the Attitude Adjustment. Seth fought it, aiming elbow shots at John's face. John was still gun shy about his nose, and deposited Seth onto the corner post. Seth took his position, and as soon as John turned back towards him, he jumped for a double knee to John's face. He missed the nose, but it sent John to the mat, allowing Seth to go for a standing somersault onto John's torso and then another pin. John kicked out in a panic.

There was a determined look on Seth's face, but still not frustration. Well, maybe a little bit. "You got this, Rollins!" I yelled. "Don't rush it!"

I wasn't sure if he heard me over the crowd, but he got John up and forced him up onto the ring post. What he was trying to do, I couldn't say, but John started to fight back, delivering elbows to the side of Seth's head, fending Seth off after a few attempts. Seth was not deterred, of course, and climbed up the other side of the ropes. He began punching John in the face, until John was leaning back enough for a double stomp to his chest. John went tumbling backwards, hitting his head hard. He was clearly dazed as he tried to use the ropes to get to his feet, but he fell over onto his back. Seth scampered across the mat and went for the pin. No dice, John kicked out at two.

Seth was definitely getting frustrated now. "Don't let him get to you, Rollins!" I called out, clapping my hands in an attempt to be encouraging. "Keep him at your pace!"

Seth spared me a glance, but his demeanor did not change, which worried me. I could hear him speaking to John. "You think you're better than me, don't you?" he asked. "You think--"

John sprung up with an energy that I had not have thought him capable of at the moment and scooped Seth up into the AA. Seth landed hard on his back. John went for the pin, but was disappointed when Seth kicked out at two and a half. They rolled away from each other, the referee in the middle, checking on both of them.

"Rollins," I said. He was looking up at the ceiling, dazed. I slammed my hands on the mat to get his attention. Wham wham wham! "Come on! Snap out of it." Wham wham wham! Wham wham wham!

"Easy for you to say," he said with a coughing wheeze. "You didn't just get the breath knocked out of you."

"Yeah, well, I decided I really want that fancy dinner, so get up! If you lose, I'm taking you to the
gas station and buying you half-frozen burritos." Wham wham wham! Wham wham wham! "Get up!"

He sniggered and wheezed again. "So demanding…"

"I learned from you," I said with a shrug and a smile.

Seth snickered as he staggered to his feet at the same time as John. John was the first one to deliver a blow, but Seth answered each one with a punch or kick of his own. It went on for a few rounds, until Seth literally beat John down to his knees and went for the Pedigree. John grabbed Seth's legs and flipped him onto his back, then catapulted him to the ring post. Seth landed on the ropes. I don't know what his plan was, but John quickly derailed it by lifting Seth onto his shoulders and slamming him face first into the mat. Seth barely kicked out in time, throwing John off to the side.

"Let's go, Rollins!" I screamed out, trying to get the crowd to join in. A few did. "Let's go, Rollins!" A few more joined in. "Let's go, Rollins!" A few people on the other side of the arena were starting their own chant.

John looked annoyed. He climbed to the top of the post and launched himself into the air at Seth, landing a hard leg drop on his head.

"SETH!" My heart dropped with a sickening thud. It looked bad. Really bad.

John went for the pin. I held my breath until Seth kicked out of it. John's annoyance had grown. Keeping my eyes on Seth, I rounded the corner of the ring. I could see his eyes, slightly glazed and definitely not in the here and now. John lifted him up, zero humor on his face, and put him over his shoulder to carry him to the ring post. Placing Seth on the post, John stepped onto the ropes, going for another AA, but Seth flipped over him, a Sunset Flip, lifted him up with John's legs over his shoulders, and ran him across the ring, throwing him into the turnbuckle. John was in pain, flailing around like he was. Seth went to the top of the ring post, took aim, and hit a beautiful Frog Splash, going right into a pin.

My jaw dropped. Instead of kicking out, John rolled backward to reverse the pin, kept a hold of Seth, and lifted him up, screaming his frustration. He tossed Seth up and over his shoulders for another AA, but Seth landed on his feet instead of his back and dropped kicked John in the face. John fell into the ropes. Seth got back to his feet quickly and tried to attack John. John ducked under, bounced off the opposite ropes and launched himself into a Crossbody attack at Seth. Seth fell backward, but amazingly, he did not stay down. He rolled through and lifted John as John had lifted him earlier. Even more amazingly, he tossed John up over his shoulders and performed John's move, the Attitude Adjustment, slamming John hard into the mat. He scrambled into the cover, but John kicked out. Both men went sprawling, their chests heaving from the effort they had been putting into this match. I was so proud of Seth. They were exhausted and it was honestly one of the best matches I had seen Seth put on. Ever.

Then I saw how much frustration was on his face. Seth got up first. He climbed to the top rope, and went for a Reverse 450 Splash.

He missed.

John got out of the way at the last second. Seth managed to roll through, but John caught Seth's leg and pulled him into the STF Leg Lock, grabbing tight into the hold to keep Seth from escaping. I ran around to that side of the ring.

"Seth!" I yelled. "Come on! You can reach the rope!" He opened his eyes, tears glistening from the
pain he was in. I held my hand out, just under the ropes, careful to not break any of the rules. "Reach for me!" No touching. No helping. No interference. He was not about to lose because of me. "Reach!"

He reached. He pulled himself forward, his fingers practically tearing into the mat. John was yelling, but I kept my focus on Seth. His fingers were so close, nearly touching the rope, nearly touching my hand.

"Reach!"

Centimeters. The tips of his fingers were mere centimeters away from the rope when John let go of the hold and dragged Seth farther from the ropes and to the center of the ring. He went to lock in the STF again, but Seth flipped around and kicked John away. He got up, charged at John. John dodged, picked up Seth for another AA, but Seth wriggled out of John's grasp. I walked around to the next side of the ring for a better view. My back was facing the ramp and I could see the announce table on the other side. Seth tried for the Pedigree. John reversed it right into the Figure Four Leg Lock. If the STF was painful, then the Figure Four was excruciating. It put pressure on both the knees, but the right knee more so. Seth was rocking back and forth a little. He's trying to reverse it...

"Reverse it! You can do it! Reverse it, Seth!" I screamed. Seth was screaming too, rolling from side to side a little more, gaining momentum, clearly in pain, but he was able to roll both himself and John over, reversing the leg lock and putting the pressure on John's knees instead of his own.

"Tap out, John! Tap out!!" Seth yelled. "Come on!!"

Cena struggled, but he was closer to the ropes that Seth had been earlier. He grabbed the ropes and forced the hold to break. Seth rolled away from John, hitting his knees to help get his circulation going. When he stood up, it was like watching a fawn walk for the first time. I bit my lip from worry as he limped over to John, who was now standing outside the ropes on the apron. John punched him, making Seth stumble, though he caught himself on the ropes and didn't go down completely. John climbed the ring post slowly, gingerly. Seth watched. I couldn't see his face, but from his stance, I surmised that he was waiting. As soon as John's feet were on the middle rope, Seth sprung up. Quick as lightning, he grabbed hold of John and flipped him up and over, bringing him down onto the mat into a Superplex. He then proceeded roll through, keeping his hold on John, then lift John up and slam him down for the Falcon Arrow. My jaw dropped a little.

It.

Was.

AMAZING.

Seth pulled John's leg up for the pin, but even more amazingly, John was able to kick out! Frustrated, Seth got up. He looked over at John, then at the ring post. Back to John. Then the ring post.

"Rollins..." I said, worried. "Whatever you do--"

He winked at me. WINKED. I had a Bad Feeling. He pulled John closer to that corner before he climbed the ring post. He glanced at me, then flipped backwards onto John, but John moved at the last second. Seth landed hard onto the mat. John grabbed Seth as he got up, hoisting him over his shoulders for the AA, but Seth was holding onto the top rope, trying to fight it. The ref moved forward to try and break it up, as per the rules, but John pulled Seth with a hard yank.
Unfortunately, the ref was too close, and Seth's feet knocked right into the ref's chest. I saw him go
down, knocked out, or at least the wind was knocked out of him. Neither John nor Seth saw that.
Jonn successfully performed the AA, slamming Seth into the mat and pulling him into a pin. The
crowd counted, but without the ref, it wasn't going to do any good. I saw Seth's head move as he
looked over at the ref, who was rolling out of the ring. He didn't even bother to kick out. *Saving
your energy. Good. You're going to need it. Just a little more, Seth. You got this.*

It took John a few more seconds before he realized what the rest of us knew. He let go of Seth to
go check on the referee. A few seconds later, he was calling for another ref to come out. Seth was
still on the mat. I didn't yell encouragement. I didn't want to distract him. I could see it clearly. He
wasn't out. He was lying in wait. Recovering as John was becoming frantic. *You've got this. You
can do this. This is your night, your match. You are in control, Seth.* John came back to Seth, lifting
him up by the neck. Seth accepted it, his body coiled in readiness. When John had him nearly
completely up, Seth struck. His knee to John's nose. A perfect strike. It didn't break his nose again,
but it did put John in immense pain. I could only imagine what was happening to him. His eyes
watering, his mind racing from panic.

Seth crawled away, closer towards where I was. "Think that'll buy some time?" he asked, his voice
and breath strained.

I nodded. "Yeah, I don't see him even trying to get up."

I heard the roar of the crowd before I saw him, and to be honest, I'm not sure if they were cheering
or booing Jon Stewart as he ran down the ramp with a steel chair in his hand. I was so shocked
when he climbed into the ring, that I couldn't move at all. He was looking back and forth between
Seth and John. The utter fear on Seth's face would have hilarious if I didn't feel the same myself. It
was when Jon hit John with the chair that my shock was broken. I was scrambling into the ring,
giving chase to the older man, following him through the ropes and around the apron. He really is
quite agile, I'll give him that. I would have caught him, but I heard the crowd counting and turned
to see that Seth had pinned John, thereby winning and becoming the first person to hold both the
World Heavyweight Championship and the US Championship at the same time.

It should have been a proud moment. And it was… for Seth. For the Authority. But not for me. I
couldn't smile at the achievement, not when I felt such anger towards Jon Stewart. I didn't stay to
see what happened. I took off up the ramp, determined to catch Jon.

*********

"You!" I screamed when I found him backstage. Jon hid behind a startled stagehand. There was no
one to stop me from bearing down on the comedian. "You ruined that match!"

"Hey, I just…"

"He had it! Seth was going to win!" The stagehand ran away, leaving Jon exposed to my wrath.

Nervously, he chuckled. "I mean… c'mon," he said with a shrug. "Who's to say he would have
won? He was pinned for more than a three count before *I* ever got out there. If the ref hadn't been
knocked out--"

"But the ref *was* knocked out!! And because of that Cena didn't win! Rollins could have come back
from that. He *would* have come back from that! *Seth didn't need your interference!!*" I wanted to
grab the man by his shirt and shake some sense into him. I bit my lip instead and forced myself to
calm down. "But what's done is done. I'm not even going to ask why. You don't have to answer to
me." Jon perked up at that. "No, not to *me*. You have to answer to the WWE Universe. Tomorrow
night at Raw. I haven't heard from the Authority, but I know them. You'll probably get an official summons before SummerSlam ends. You can't escape this." His face fell a little, but he didn't seem too disturbed.

**********

"Dollface…"

"Don't call me dollface, Rollins," I said coldly. I didn't turn around to look at him, but I heard him sigh.

"Look, about the match…"

"You won. You became the first man to hold both titles at the same time. Congratulations." I zipped my backpack closed a little harder than necessary. "A proud moment. Maybe even worthy of that statue you'll be getting."

"Hey… it wasn't my fau--"

"I know!" I yelled. Tears were prickling at my eyes. I was having a harder time breathing than I would have liked, but I couldn't help it. I was just still so angry. "You didn't do anything wrong in that situation. Surprisingly. It was Stewart. It was completely him, but… I can't… I can't feel good about this win, Rollins. I'm sorry. I really am." I turned around to face him. "And the kicker is… you were moments away from winning it on your own."

"You don't kn--"

I covered his mouth with my hand to silence him and gave him a sad smile. "I do know, Seth. I could see it. You are the Architect, but I am the analyst. I see the flaws, the successes… You construct a plan based on both our observations. It's why we always worked so well together. Last night… I could see it. The path was clear. John just needed one more push. One more push… and he would have fallen. You would have won. You would have…" I couldn't stop the tears from falling then. "Why can't they believe in you like I do…"

He didn't say anything, just pulled me into his arms to hold me as I cried over the match.

**********

I heard later that Becky had won the Divas elimination match for Team PCB. I sent her, Paige and Charlotte separate text messages, telling them congratulations. I also heard that Brock had lost his match to Undertaker. There had been a false finish, a low blow from Undertaker to Brock when the referee's back was turned, and the final finish when Undertaker made Brock pass out in his Hell's Gate submission hold. As much as I hated breaking rules, I couldn't hate Taker too much for what he had done. Tsk, tsk, Undertaker, I thought with a small smile. Tsk tsk.

^v^v^v^v^v

Raw - August 24, 2015

I trailed behind Seth and Hunter as we walked the hallway in the WWE World Headquarters building. A giant poster from last night's SummerSlam decorated the wall, Brock and Taker looming over the three of us as Hunter spoke to Seth, both dressed nicely in business suits, though Seth was wearing all black. To be fair, it just looked devastatingly fantastic on him, and I hoped he only ever wore all black suits for the rest of eternity. My own attire was professional, but definitely not as nice as something Stephanie would wear.
They were talking about the honor and prestige of the men who had come before Seth, but I was only paying half-attention, and mostly wondering where I could get a decent cup of coffee. Seth and I had stayed up late, watching old Looney Toons cartoons on some local channel. I had fallen asleep next to him, but had woken up alone. Coffee was going to be essential if I was going to get through today.

Make that two cups of coffee, I thought. Seth was chipper now, but he'd be asking for his caffeine dose pretty soon if the past few weeks were any indication. Can't possibly be good for his sleep schedule.

"You ready to go?" Seth asked me a few minutes later, awkwardly shifting the weight of the two championship belts. It would take some getting used to for him. Hunter was heading in the opposite direction, back to his office, I presumed.

"Yeah. This place gives me the creeps. It's like being in the lion's den." Taking the US Championship from Seth, I looked over at the statues of Andre the Giant, Rick Flair and Bruno Sammartino. Soon, Seth's likeness would be joining them, but I still felt uneasy about it.

"What? Why? You're part of the Authority, dollface. Just like me. You belong here just as much as I do."

I smiled at him, but I wondered if either of us truly belonged with the corporate entity.

**********

Brock and Paul addressed the crowd at the beginning of the show, with Paul complaining about the ending to Undertaker's match against Brock. As much as I knew Paul was right, I had a hard time feeling sympathy for his plight. Paul issued a challenge to Taker for right then, right there, but of all the wrestlers that could have come out, it had been Bo Dallas. He had done his usual spiel about bo-lieving in one's self and Brock had given him five German suplexes and an F5. Poor Bo.

**********

"Oh. My. God." I turned to look at Paige, who was watching the monitor intensely. "They're back."

"Who's back?" Charlotte asked. She, Becky and I joined Paige. "Oh… wow. Didn't think we'd ever see them again in WWE."

We watched at the newly returned Dudley Boyz returned to put New Day, and specifically Xavier Woods, through a table with a good ol' 3D.

"Tag team division won't know what hit them," Paige said with a smile.

**********

While John's Make A Wish video package was playing, Seth was pacing in a back hallway. As much as I disliked him, the fact that he had granted his five-hundredth wish was really impressive.

"Do you want me to go in first?" I asked Seth.

"Could you? Just… see how the vibe is. I'll come in a minute later, and you either rush me out of there or just let me stay." He was still dressed nicely in his all black suit and tie. I had ditched the jacket that went with my outfit, and was just wearing a white sleeveless blouse with black slacks. Still wore my kick ass combat boots though.
"Yeah, sure." I opened the door to see Stephanie and Hunter standing in front of a bronze statue of Seth. I shut the door behind me before saying, "I can't believe you got it done so quickly."

Stephanie and Hunter turned in surprise. "Oh, you startled me," Stephanie said. "Is Seth…"

"He's waiting outside. I'm just scouting ahead to make sure it's safe for him to come in." I took a look at the statue. "It's amazing."

Hunter smiled. "We were just saying that. As for the quickness, well, we had it made already, and if he had lost… it would just have become scrap metal."

"Oh…" It seemed a bit callous to me, but I suppose it was logical. "Um… About the end of the match, sir…" I took a deep breath. "I'm sorry that I didn't act sooner. I should have prevented Jon Stewart from--"

"Don't worry about it," Hunter said, waving my words away. I almost didn't hear what he said next, since he was saying it to Stephanie in a low voice. "Everything went according to plan."

I frowned. "Sir?"

Stephanie smirked at me. "Come on. Jon Stewart is a lot of things, but he would never have--"

Hunter frowned at Stephanie. "I mean…"

"What we mean to say is, all's well that ends well. Seth got the championship, and this bonus. We're happy, and that's what matters here."

"Um, ok…" I had a Bad Feeling, but I wasn't quite sure what to make of their words. "Well, Rollins should be coming in any second now."

Stephanie hustled to cover the statue as Hunter studied me. "You really would have tried to stop Stewart, wouldn't you?"

"Well… yes. I thought he was going to help John, but regardless of who he helped, I simply wish I has been able to act sooner."

"Hmph. Like I said, all's well that ends well. A knock on the door prevented us from speaking further, and Seth came in. I tuned out his platitudes for our bosses, as I tried to figure out what about the conversation was bugging me.

**********

"Dollface--"

"Shhh!!"

Seth looked over my shoulder at the monitor I was watching. "What's going on?" he whispered. I rolled my eyes, lowered the volume, and turned around to face him.

"Bray requested, and Roman and Dean agreed to, a SummerSlam rematch. I think it's idiotic, and told them so, but they're not about to listen to me, even if I'm right--"

"Like you listen to them?" he asked, raising an eyebrow and grinning.

I scowled. "Shut up, Rollins. My point is, it's extremely suspicious for Bray to want a rematch like this. He's planning something, I just know it… Well, ok, I don't know it, but I don't trust him, and--"
"Uh, well, you know," he suddenly had look of panic as he looked past me to the monitor. I started to turn around, but he grabbed me. "Dollface, you have to trust me. You do not want to look at the screen right now."

"What?! Why??" I tried harder to turn, but Seth pulled me in and held me tight. "Let go!"

"Trust me. You don't want this in your head." He held me to his chest for a few more minutes. "Ok, it's over… you might want to head to medical. Roman and Dean will be there." He pushed me towards the door. "Go on. But be back in time for my statue unveiling, got it?"

I nodded dumbly, not sure what was going on, but hitching a ride on a golf cart to get there faster.

**********

Becky, Paige and Charlotte caught me right before they went out to the ring for their Miz TV interview. I wished them luck, but my focus was on the medical room. I found Roman and Dean there, lying motionless on the exam tables set up.

"They'll be fine," one of the med techs told me. I couldn't remember her name at the moment. "They just passed out from the choke hold."

"They're going to be mad as hell when they wake up." I sat down in between them. "When do you expect that, by the way?"

She smiled at me. "I was just about to wake them. They need to go to the hospital for a full medical check, but it would probably be better for them to wake up in familiar surroundings." Both sat up as soon as the scent of the smelling salts hit their nose.

"Wazzit… Where are we?" Dean asked, looking around. "Oh, hey, kiddo. How's it going? Why am I shirtless?"

I hugged him tightly. "OH! Don't scare me like that!"

"You shouldn't be here," Roman said quietly, brushing his long hair away from in front of his face. "Get back to Seth."

"But--"

"No buts, baby girl," he said, his voice somber and grave. "Get out of here before the Wyatts see you. And don't come near us again until this is done."

"But… what about family nights…"

"Promise me, baby girl. Promise me you'll stay with… that you'll stay with Seth, stay away from the Wyatts, from us. You saw our match--"

"Actually, I only saw part of it. Rollins stopped me from watching the ending. Said I didn't need that in my head." Roman looked almost relieved to hear that.

"Good… don't watch it if you can help it. You'll learn soon enough about him. They have a new member, this guy… he's a monster. Tossed us around like a pitbull with a chew toy. We can't let him get to you." Roman looked at me with such serious eyes. "Promise me."

I wanted to protest more, but the looks both Roman and Dean were giving me gave me pause. "Ok… I promise."
I could not believe what I was hearing as I watched the monitor. Jon Stewart had just said that the reason he had interfered was because he hadn't wanted Cena to tie Rick Flair for his record of sixteen time WWE Heavyweight Champion. It was moronic. Jeez... all for a record? Records are broken all the time. I'm surprised Hunter didn't pick up on this-- Wait...

The pieces began to click together in my mind. Jon and Hunter had been speaking before Seth's match. Hunter had said that everything had gone according to plan. Considering it was Rick Flair who passed his legacy on to Hunter, and Rick was Jon's idol... "He told Jon to interfere," I whispered to myself. Then I shook my head. No, Hunter wouldn't tell him that... but to suggest it... to imply it... he would certainly do that. He probably got Jon Stewart all stirred up, turned his back at just the right moment... It was a risky but brilliant plan. Make Jon think it was his idea, and then like an arrow, let him loose.

"Did you say something, dollface?" Seth asked me, looking up from whatever book he was reading on my tablet. I was back in his locker room, as promised, waiting on a text message from Roman or Dean about how their visit to the hospital went.

How could I tell him that his mentor had betrayed him? I wasn't even certain it was true. It might have just been a turn of phrase, might have been that luck was on Hunter's side. I had no conclusive evidence. "Yeah, just... Stewart's reason for interfering... it's kinda dumb."

"Eh, I wasn't listening, but he's a crazy old man. Probably not going to be allowed in as anything other than a ticket holder ever again."

I turned my attention back to the monitor. Rick Flair had come out and was telling Jon that he was fine with Cena tying his record, because he respected John. The look on Jon's face was priceless. Then Cena came out to confront Jon. The poor man's face fell even further when Cena pointed out that Jon's actions had caused the Authority to have control over not just the Heavyweight title, but also the US title. He tried to apologize, but Cena was too pissed off. I almost felt sorry for Jon as he got AA'ed right into the mat. I did not, however, feel sorry for Cena, when he was later escorted from the building to prevent him from messing up Seth's celebration. Worst. Hero. Ever.

**********

Blackness with a few wisps of smoke signalled Bray's arrival on the screen. He claimed to have been given a gift to fight the lie that was Roman. A man stood behind Bray and Luke, wearing a sheep mask like Luke and Erick had previously done, but this one was black instead of white.

This must be who Roman was talking about. He had yet to say anything and I already felt chills creeping up my spine.

"His name..." Bray said, almost lovingly, "is Braun Strowman. Abigail sent him to me. He is her black sheep, and he has a message for you, Roman..."

Braun removed the mask covering his face and leaned in close to the camera, "Run."

**********

The arena was oddly quiet. There were people making noise, of course, but it was much quieter than usual, and there was a weird vibe in the air. Neither Stephanie, Hunter, nor Seth seemed to notice it though. Maybe it had been the terrible singing of the "Happy Birthday" song to Mr. McMahon that had been done as we waited in gorilla. He had been pissed when Hunter and
Stephanie had led the audience in the song. Seth had been more amused by it than anything, but everyone in gorilla had had enough self preservation to not join in. I looked down at the US title around Seth's waist, and then at the WWE Heavyweight title slung over his shoulder.

"I have a Bad Feeling…" I said quietly. Maybe it had been Bray's introduction of Braun, combined with the promise Roman had extracted from me.

"You ok, dollface?"

"Yeah, just… something feels off." I looked up at him. "Maybe I should stay in the back for this."

"Nononono… you already backed out of the dinner deal, so you're staying here. You have to be by my side. You look really good in that, by the way." I hadn't changed my clothes since earlier. I felt gross and sweaty, and of course didn't believe him.

"Thanks, I guess." Hunter announced Seth and we walked out. In the middle of the ring was the covered display case. We reached the ropes and he held them open for me. I bowed my head and ducked in between them. Hunter and Stephanie stood on one side, but I still felt like a mouse next to Stephanie, so I went to the other side of the display to stand with Seth. He spoke about what an honor it was to win both titles, to be given a statue, to be immortalized. I smiled a little. I had to admit, it was pretty cool. The short glimpse I had of the statue earlier was not enough to really make an assessment, so I was looking forward to seeing it again. Seth began to wind down his speech.

"Heroes get remembered, but legends never die." Seth grinned at his Babe Ruth quote. "And last night, with my win over John Cena, and becoming the first person to hold both the US Title and the WWE Heavyweight Championship, I ascended to legend." Stephanie and Hunter applauded like proud parents. I clapped as well, though less enthusiastically. Seth didn't seem to mind. I think he was just happy that I wasn't depressed about the match anymore. "And tonight, with this statue, I ascend even higher to immortality!"

I laughed at that. I could just see him dressed up as a Greek god, an immortal with the power of… maybe like Apollo? Or Zeus. Ares would suit him as well. If he wore some of those short skirted toga outfits that showed off his thighs, I bet he could break the minds of all the fangirls and fanboys. I laughed again. It was amusing.

"I said a lot of mean, nasty things about John Cena over the past month. Most, if not all, of them well deserved. I meant every single word, that he is a disease, that he has held this division hostage, but… but there is a reason he was on top the mountain that is WWE. It's because he worked every single day to be the man. He was the man. Truth. But…" He lowered his head, looking thoughtful. "But… if you wanna be the man…" The crowd started to get rowdy and Seth smiled. "Yeah, you know where I'm going with this. If you wanna be the man, you have to beat the man, and baby, I just kicked his ass all the way to the next pay-per-view!" He cackled with delight. "Now, without further ado…with the revealing of this statue, I will no longer be the future. I will be the Man."

I stepped back a little and turned to face the covered statue. The thick black velvet was held up on a framework, making it easier to be lifted to reveal the statue. A drumroll started, and the velvet curtain was raised slowly. I frowned. I didn't remember the statue having black on it, or real shoes. Or real pants. I froze. Seth realized it at the same moment I had, but Stephanie and Hunter did not until the very real person underneath was revealed.

The entire arena went silent. I could even hear Michael Cole yell, "OH MY GOD, IT'S STING!" Then it was like an eruption of sound as the audience lost their minds over his sudden appearance.
"Dollface, get behind me..." Seth whispered, but I couldn't move as I stared at the living legend in front of me. Sting. No one had seen him since his match at Wrestlemania against Hunter, the same Wrestlemania where Seth won the championship. Dressed in all black, his face painted in white with black stripes under his eyes. The paint near his hairline was messed up, probably from when he climbed under the velvet curtain. How long had he been waiting... and where's the statue if it's not here...? I knew I should have been thinking of other things, but for some reason, those were the questions that popped into my head.

Hunter was backing Stephanie out of the ring and to the safety of the ramp. I felt Seth's hand grabbing at mine, but I suppose he was keeping his eyes on Sting, because he kept missing. Finally, he caught hold of my arm and pulled me towards him, then pushed me towards the ropes behind him. He dropped the Heavyweight title to the mat as he went after Sting. It was a quick fight, since Seth was limited by his suit, and was sent flying out of the ring. Sting turned to me. I couldn't move as he took a step closer, keeping his unblinking eye on me. He reached down to pick up the fallen title in the middle of the ring, then turned and held it aloft. A sigh of relief escaped me, but then I realized what he was doing.

He's... he's challenging Seth?!

"That's mine!" Seth was shouting angrily. "Give it back! Give it back!"

Sting lowered the belt and looked down at it. He turned slowly to look at me. Outside the ring, I could see Seth's eyes go wide.

"Leave her alone!" he screamed. "Get the fuck away from her!!" He tried to get to the ring, but Hunter held him back. He was whispering something to Seth, who was struggling to be freed, popping the buttons off his shirt in that struggle, which showed off his torso. In another situation, I might have enjoyed that sight.

Sting advanced on me slowly. I couldn't look away, no matter how much I wanted to run. "I'll give this back," he said in a low voice, handing me the title belt. "But I will return for it, when it is rightfully mine. Be a good girl and keep it safe. Now get on out of here, before your little boyfriend has an aneurysm."

I stepped away hesitantly, taking one step, then another, holding on tight to the belt, just waiting for him to pull me back and... take the title? Punish me in Seth's place? I didn't know what he would do, but I didn't breathe right until I was out of the ring and backstage. I did not push Seth away from the fierce hug he gave me once we were safe. He checked me over to make sure I was ok and then hugged me a second time.

Renee approached us carefully. "Um, Seth, can I get your reaction to Sting's statement in the ring?"

"That asshole..." Seth seethed. His arm was still around my shoulders as he spoke to her, which was a bit awkward. "He thinks he can come in here, ruin my night... well, he has another thing coming! And where the hell is my statue?! I demand my statue!!"

"Calm down, Seth," Stephanie said. "Let's just... think this through."

"No! No, we're not going to just think this through," Hunter said. "Sting attacks us and thinks he can get away with it. I should have finished him when I had the chance at Wrestlemania. But I didn't... and now here we are... He wants a match? That's what he wants, isn't it? A match with our WWE World Heavyweight Champion?! Then that is exactly what he's going to get." He grabbed Renee's microphone and looked directly into the camera. "You better be careful what you wish for, Sting, because you will regret it."
He let go of the microphone and turned to Seth.

"At Night of Champions, Sting will get what he deserves when he goes one on one with Seth Rollins."

"Yes… yes!!" Seth shouted.

"And he is going to get every single bit of him!" Hunter slapped Seth across the chest, narrowly missing my head.

"Damn right!" Seth yelled.

"Isn't that right?!" Hunter screamed, hitting Seth again. I had to pull free of Seth or risk getting hit by Hunter's meaty hands.

"Fuck yeah! The Stinger won't know what hit him!"

"You will finish him!" SLAP.

"Yeah! Hell yeah! I will finish him!!"

Stephanie and I exchanged glances with Renee. Men are so strange sometimes.

**********

"What are you doing?"

Seth turned around, looking very guilty. I had caught him in the hallway, dressed in his workout gear and carrying a gym bag. There were dark circles under his eyes that I hadn't noticed earlier. Must have asked the Glam Squad to cover them during the show.

"Uh… just… going to a late night workout?" he said.

I gave him my best death glare, which might have been more intimidating if I wasn't in my pajamas and holding an ice bucket while wearing fuzzy slippers. "It's one in the morning. You should be asleep."

"I know," he said with a defeated sigh. "But I haven't gotten my workout in today, and I don't know when I'll have another chance! I can't sleep, keep thinking about what happened earlier. I mean… what the hell did he do with my statue, you know? Besides, I'm just going to the hotel gym, since I couldn't find any all night places…"

"Rollins…" I rubbed the bridge of my nose. I was too tired for this. "Seriously? You're concerned about the damn statue?"

"And what are you doing up?" he demanded, switching tactics.

"Hey, this isn't about me!" I growled. He had that stubborn look on his face. He wasn't about to budge until I answered. "FINE, if you must know, I was talking to Richard, that guy I'm going out with. I haven't seen him in a while, and that was the only time he was available to talk on the phone. But then I couldn't sleep, so I decided to walk around a bit to tire myself out. The ice bucket is just… in case anyone saw me, they'd think I was just going to get ice." I shifted my weight to the other foot. It sounded stupid, which it was, but also, I hadn't really talked about my blossoming relationship with Richard to anyone. I wasn't even sure it could be categorized as blossoming.

Seth was watching me, his face inscrutable. "You really like him?"
I shrugged. "He's nice. Treats me well. Easy to talk to…"

"Same could be said about dogs," Seth said with a snort. I rolled my eyes. "Does he make your stomach flutter? Does he take your breath away when he kisses you?"

"We haven't actually had any dates, Rollins. Remember?" I said quietly. I didn't want to admit that I hadn't felt those feelings about anyone in a long time. Dan had invoked those feelings way back when, and Seth had definitely caused a lot of butterflies in my stomach over the years, but it wasn't like he was an option. I'd be waiting forever if I depended on that stuff. "We've been spending a lot of time just… talking, texting. We're getting to know each other."

"That doesn't answer the question, dollface. You can still get those feelings before any dating starts."

I did not like where this conversation was going. It was awkward enough trying to connect with Richard due to my schedule, but talking about it to Seth was even more so. "Just go do your workout," I hissed, turning on my heel to stomp away to my room. "And don't call me dollface!!"

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - August 27, 2015

Bray, Luke and the masked Braun opened the show. I hadn't seen Roman or Dean at all, and I wondered if they were watching as well.

"You have been deceived," Luke said. "The lies have clogged your minds and hearts. You don't even know that you are already dead, but this man, Bray Wyatt, his words will give you truth, and that truth will give you life!" He stepped back and handed Bray the microphone.

Bray gave a low chuckle into the mic. "Listen well, little children. Unlike Roman Reigns, I don't just carelessly speak of family, of brothers and sisters. I don't use them as a way to cover my selfish, cowardly ways. When I call someone family, I MEAN it!"

I bit my lip, wanting to shout at the monitor, to argue with Bray. Family… you know nothing of our family.

"My family means everything to me, and I… I mean everything to my family…" Another low chuckle. I couldn't even begin to fathom what was so amusing. "My dear sister, my dear Abigail, she lifts me up, she inspires me, guides me! When I stumble, she is there to pick me up. And when I need help, she sends me… her best. Her black sheep. Her savior. And that is what being a family is all about…"

"That is only half of it," I grumbled.

"Oh, Braun," Bray crowed, "Abigail has told me so much about you… she glowed when she sang your praises. She knew you were perfectly imperfect, and she knew… SHE KNEW… where I could lead you. She saw greatness in you, and has entrusted me with you. And now, it is time. For I, I am the NEW face of fear!" He extended his arms wide, laughing like a hyena. "Luke Harper… the new face of desolation. With Braun Strowman… the new face of destruction. No one can withstand us." He continued to laugh as Braun removed his mask, grinning madly into the camera.

It was both a relief and a worry when I heard Roman's music hit the speakers. "Shit," I said softly.

"Maybe you shouldn't watch," Seth suggested.
"Maybe you should shut the hell up."

"Testy. Fine. Be that way. Let me know if you need a hug."

"Shut up, Rollins." My cheeks burned a little from him being so nice. It was weird.

Roman and Dean got to the ring, but didn't enter it right away. "I can admit it. Your bigg'n there... he whooped our asses on Monday. But it's not the first time that's happened. Probably not the last time either. And if we're going down, we're not going without a fight."

Dean tapped him on the chest to get his attention. "I'll take the ugly one," he said.

"Which one is the ugly one?" one of the announcers asked.

They entered the ring. Braun and Roman squared up, but moments later, Bray called him off, and the three men left the ring. The microphones just barely picked up Bray's taunts. "I'm inside your head, Roman. I'm inside... your... head..."

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"You ok to go out there, dollface?"

"Yeah." While I had been shaken after Sting's attack on Seth and the Authority on Monday, and the new development with the Wyatts, I was mostly certain that at least Sting never meant me any harm. Mostly. "You still mad? About Sting, I mean."

"Damn straight. This might get ugly."

Once we were out in the ring, I sat on the top turnbuckle of the ring post while Seth ranted about how his immortality had been ruined. "It was supposed to be the greatest night of my life!! But instead... Instead... Sting shows up."

The video clip from Monday played on the screen above the ramp. Damn... I just look so scared there. I mean, I was, but... and Seth looks... He actually looked a little bit heroic. At least until Sting sent him flying out of the ring. And then Hunter holding him back made him look like he was the one who needed a hero.

Seth snarled a little into the mic, "I don't blame Sting for... his interruption. Hell, if I were him, I'd be jealous of me, too!" I sighed.

"Reel it in, Rollins," I called out. "Just asking for Sting to show up again..."

"I wish he would! Then I'd show him exactly what I'm made of." He turned back to the hard camera to talk to Sting. "I have done more in the past year than you've done in your entire career!"

"Rollins!" I hissed. "Would you please not antagonize him tonight?"

He flat out ignored me. "What gives him the right... to come into my ring, hold my title above his head, threaten my manager..." He was holding the microphone so tightly, it was shaking. "What reason could he possibly have to come here, without provocation, and steal my moment?! I have news for you, my friend... that was the exact wrong thing to do!" He smiled that dangerous smile of his. "You want to go up against me? You got it! And at Night of Champions, I will show you exactly what makes me the best, what makes me the Man of WWE. Trust me, you will not enjoy it." He tossed the mic at one of the stage hands. "Let's go, dollface. I've said what I've needed to say."
We left the arena shortly after that. Seth wasn't scheduled for any matches, and I just wanted to get out of there. I missed Dean's match with Sheamus, but from what I heard, it was probably a good thing that I did. The Wyatts involved themselves, Dean lost his match, and Roman passed out again from Braun's chokehold when he tried to help Dean.
"Oh… things are making so much more sense now," I said.

"What are you going on about?" Seth growled. We were listening to Sting speak about why he had a problem with Seth and why he had decided to crash the statue unveiling last week.

"You pissed off Sting with your statue, by believing you're ready to be among the legends of our industry." I sighed. "I hate agreeing with him, but I am still of the opinion that you are not ready for that sort of honor. Someday, yes, totally, but not right now."

Seth grumbled.

"Maybe she's right, Seth." Stephanie had been watching with us.

"No, she's not, and neither is Sting! What the hell is he talking about, injustices and whatever. This is my year! I've burned Suplex City to the ground, I've defended my championship against multiple opponents, against whoever rose to the top to challenge me… He's spitting in my face, in the face of the Authority!"

"Calm down, Seth," Stephanie said. "There's more than one way to look at this. You have Sting at Night of Champions. You beat him, and that will help cement your legacy."

"Oh, I will. I will beat him into the ground," Seth growled. "I will show him that I am better than anyone he's ever gone up against. Anyone."

"Uh…" I was starting to panic as I saw Stephanie's eyes narrow. In his speech, Sting has specifically said that Seth was "not even half the man Triple H is." This was bad.

"What did you say…" Stephanie said slowly. Seth didn't catch the danger in her voice, but I did.

"I said--"

"OH! Look at the time, Rollins has an interview to get ready for," I said, shoving him out the door. He tried to resist but I pinched him on the underside of his arm. That got him moving. I would have to remember that for next time. "See you later, boss!"

Once we were out of her office and a good distance away, I let go of Seth. "What the hell was that?" he demanded.

"Are you insane?! You do not say stuff like that to your boss!"
"What? What are you talking about?"

I wanted to slap him. So I did. On his arm, though, not his face. As hard as I could.

"OW! That hurt!"

"GOOD. You are such a… Oh my god… You just…” I couldn't even get the words out, I was so upset. I took a deep breath. "You are so stupid! You just insulted Triple H to Stephanie! To Stephanie!! The woman who's insanely in love with her husband! And has been known to abuse her power to get him what she thinks he deserves!" I slapped him again. He winced, but didn't say anything. "You just told her to her face that you are better than him!"

"It's true though…” He was pouting. Pouting. Did he not see how bad this was?!

"That doesn't matter, you do not say that to Stephanie. You… ARGH!!" I slapped his arm a third time. "And all of this because of a stupid statue."

"It's not stupid, and I want it back."

"You want your statue back, Seth?"

I froze, and turned to see Stephanie standing a few feet away. How much of our conversation did she hear?! I thought in a panic.

"Of course I want it back!" I smacked him. He flinched but didn't acknowledge it otherwise. Stephanie gave me a somewhat sarcastic, sympathetic look.

"If you want it so bad, why don't you go ask Sting for it," she said before turning on her heel and marching away.

"Oh, this is bad… this is very bad…” I said, looking up at Seth, who just seemed angry in general.

************

Seth was making notes while I watched the monitors. Rusev and Dolph had a match that ended in disqualification after Summer Rae attacked Dolph. He had pinned Rusev and I suppose Summer just didn't want her boytoy to lose like that? I have no idea what goes through her head. Rusev lost anyway, because of the disqualification. Lana attacked Summer after that, before retreating with Dolph to the ramp and leaving Rusev and Summer in a crying heap. I was a little proud that Lana was standing up for herself like that.

Becky had a match with Alicia Fox after that. Since Team PCB had won the elimination match at SummerSlam, all three of them were now competing in a Beat The Clock Challenge. Whoever had the fastest time would get to challenge Nikki Bella for her title. Becky set the bar at three minutes and forty-one seconds. Not too shabby.

Ryback and Big Show had the next match, and it was for the Intercontinental Title. A SummerSlam rematch, since Big Show hadn't been pinned for Ryback's win to retain the title. Miz, who had been pinned, was on commentary, making snarky remarks. I only half paid attention to that one. Part of me wished Dean or Roman would go after the title, but since they were busy with the Wyatts, that would have to wait for a later time.

Charlotte had the next Beat the Clock Challenge match, against Brie Bella. Brie's concentration seemed to be elsewhere, because Charlotte won the match in only one minute and forty seconds. My heart went out to Paige. It would be tough to beat that time.
Roman sent me a text message to tell me that if I watched Dean's match with Braun Strowman, I would get my ass kicked by him personally. I sent him back a picture of me flipping him off, and said if it meant that much to him, he should ask politely.

He sent a much more polite reply a few minutes after that. I turned the monitor off in Seth's locker room, telling him it was so he could concentrate better on his notes.

"Seth," Renee said, as we met with her for Seth's interview. "Have you had any luck finding your statue?"

Standing to the side, I listened carefully to Seth's irritated response. I hadn't been lying earlier about the interview, but I had stretched the truth about how much time he needed to get ready for it. Not that it had helped us out of that situation. I just hoped Stephanie didn't hold it against me. I was mostly certain that she knew I was trying to get Seth to behave.

"And that's why," Seth said, breaking my train of thought, "I'm going to go out to the ring, and I will call Sting out to demand my statue back!"

"That'll work out well, I'm sure," I muttered. Renee snorted a laugh, but Seth gave me a dirty look before walking away. "Sorry, Rini, looks like the interview is over."

"It's cool. Might want to chase after him," she said, looking in Seth's direction.

"Yeah… maybe. Maybe not." I watched him slow down, look behind towards me, then keep walking. He did this about two more times before I gave in. "Ugh… Fine… I'll see you later," I told Renee.

When I caught up to Seth, he had found a little alcove to stew in. "Dollface, make sure I have time to talk at the end of the night. I'm going to get my statue back one way or another…"

"This is SO stupid. It's just a statue."

"It's more than that!" Seth hissed at me. "This is my legacy, my immortality, my--"

"Your fucking ego, that's what it is," I snarled at him. "And here I thought you had gotten past this!"

"Hey, it's not ego if it's well earned!"

I stared at him. "What the hell is wrong with you?! Why are you so obsessed with this statue and your… your immortality? It's not--"

"It's just like Trips said."


"He seemed fine with it."

"STOP INTERRUPTING ME, YOU JACKHOLE."

"... Jackhole?"
"A jackass's asshole."

"... that's not very nice…"

"I DON'T CARE. YOU'RE BEING ONE, I WILL CALL YOU ONE."

"Easy on the volume, dollface," he said, taking a step back.

"DON'T CALL ME DOLLFACE, FOR THE LOVE OF--" I stopped myself, took a deep breath, then a second one. "Ok, look, I get that I've been telling you how great you are, but seriously, you never had such a big head over it."

"Yeah, well, I guess I never really realized how great I was when you said it."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Excuse me?!"

"Well, I mean…" He shrugged. "I knew it. I believed you, not saying I didn't, but after dinner with Trips and Stephanie… Things just sort of… I guess, things just made more sense."

"Wait…" I stared at him. "First, don't call him 'Trips', it's weird and disrespectful. Second… When did you have dinner with them?"

"Last week, after SummerSlam. Well, after you fell asleep on my arm." He looked away for a second. "You snore a little by the way. It's kinda cute."

I blinked in surprise. "Shut up." Then I realized what he said. "Wait… how late were you up that night…"

"Doesn't matter. So I got a call from Trips--"

"Respect your boss, Rollins." I already didn't like the way this was starting.

"Fine, Hunter. I got a call from him, inviting me to their suite over at the Hilton. They had a chef on call, we ordered up some steaks, and Tri-- I mean, Hunter told me a lot of things, but basically, that I am exactly what I've been saying. And winning the duel titles proves it. You said it yourself, I had it, I would have won even without Jon Stewart."

I nodded, but there was a sinking feeling in my stomach. "I did say that…"

"So, see? And this statue, that is a representation of my greatness, so for it to be stolen… you see where I'm going with this?"

I nodded again, regretting a lot of things I had done or said. "I understand." I understood alright. I understood that the statue, and his giant ego, had to be destroyed.

**********

"Heeeeyyyyy…" I said to Paige. She was sitting alone in the locker room, punching a balled up Sasha Banks t-shirt. "I heard about your match… I wanted to watch it, but Rollins was… being Rollins… You ok?" Paige had not been able to beat Charlotte's time.

"Damn anime brat…" Paige said angrily. "And damn that Bella for making it soooo easy for Charlotte." She looked around in a panic, then let out a sigh of relief. "I mean… I'm happy for Charlotte. So happy. She's my sister, and she earned this… she earned… this…” She choked back a sob.
I wrapped my arms around her and held her tightly as she started to cry. "Let it out, Paige… it's ok. You'll be ok," I whispered softly to her.

**********

Paige left not long after the tears stopped. I promised to come hang out with her, Charlotte and Becky after the show ended, but before that, I had to suffer through whatever Seth had planned in his talking points to end the night. He refused to let me know what he had planned, but I gave him a very thorough rundown of what he couldn't say, what he shouldn't say, and what I thought he should stick to saying if he was going to be so determined about the statue.

Seth was seething as he paced inside the ring, ignoring the jeers of the crowd. "You know, once upon a time, I looked up to Sting. And frankly, as of last Sunday, I had no issue with him. But then Monday rolled around and… oh ho ho, that was a big mistake. But that will be settled at Night of Champions. Right now… there are two things I want from Sting. First, I want him to take back what he said about Hunter being better than me. I am just as good as him, and one day, maybe I'll be even better."

"Goddamn it, Rollins," I said, dragging my hands over my face in exasperation. I had specifically warned him to not talk about our boss. At all.

"Second, he has something of mine, and I want it back. That statue… it represents so much more than he could ever understand, more than he could ever amount to. It represents me, the greatest WWE Champion of all!" He raised the WWE World title above his head while the crowd booed cheerfully. "So," he said, lowering his arm and turning to the ramp, "If you have the guts, come face me! I want it back! C'mon, Sting! Get your ass out here and tell me where you put my statue!"

I was not the least bit surprised when, instead of Sting, Stephanie came out to the ring. Seth, on the other hand, questioned her presence. "What's going on?" he asked. "I'm waiting for Sting."

"Seth, I know I'm the one who told you to talk to Sting, but I'm going to need you to stop talking about my husband," she said, giving Seth one of the harshest death glares I've ever seen. He looked over to me, but I just mouthed I told you so. I hoped my death glare was even half as good as Stephanie's.

"Oh, nonononono, I didn't mean… that is… uh…"

"No, go on, Seth," Stephanie said, advancing on him like a lioness stalking her prey. "Please. Explain."

To his credit, he did take a moment to think about what he was going to say before he said it. It sort of helped. "When Hunter was the head of Evolution, he was often compared to Rick Flair, and, and, and," he said when he saw that Stephanie was about to interrupt him. "And he didn't take that. He was the Man… at that time. But that time has passed, and now… I'm the Man."

Stephanie took a step back, possibly to prevent herself from slapping Seth across his face, breathed deeply, then smiled sweetly and said, "Seth, you're confused."

"I am?"

"Yes. Sting has got you turned upside down and inside out, this is some of the oldest tricks in the book. This isn't about Hunter, or you versus the Authority, or even about the statue! This is about Sting trying to unnerve you, to unseat you. You are the WWE Heavyweight Champion. You are the United States Champion. You are the first, the first, to hold both titles and that means you are the
Man.” She gave him a proud mom smile. "So don't let him mess with your head and lose focus on what really matters… The reason you came out here."

"Yeah… Yeah! I had a reason for being in this ring, for calling Sting out." He turned back to the ramp. "Sting! Get out here and tell me where you put my statue!!" He paced a bit. "Come on!! Get out here!"

Entrance music started up again, but it was not Sting's. I sighed wearily as John Cena came out and walked to the ring. Seth swore a string of expletives that were thankfully not picked up by the microphone.

"John," I said, standing next to Seth, as the other man climbed into the ring. "What do you want?"

"Oh, just came to have that little talk with Seth I wanted to have last week. You know, before I got banned from the arena."

"You AA'ed an old man who is not in the business, John. I'm surprised you weren't suspended or even fired," I said in clipped tones. "You want to talk, then talk, but you'll be keeping a distance from Rollins."

"That's just fine," he said with a smile. "I can do plenty of damage over here. I know I'm probably the last person you want to see right now, Seth."

"You have no reason to be out here," Seth snapped.

"I disagree. I have a perfectly valid reason, and that is to show you exactly how expendable you are to the Authority." I frowned at John's words. "You see, you think they're your friends, that you're a family? Buddy, not even your manager likes you."

"Watch your tongue, John," I said coldly.

"It's a well known fact that you don't like his tactics," John countered. I couldn't argue with that, but I did growl at him. "Right now, Seth, you're probably expecting Steph to throw me out of this ring and ban me from the arena again."

"That would be helpful," Seth said, looking to Stephanie.

"She won't," John said.

"Why not?!" Seth asked.

"There are no reasonable grounds to do so," I reminded him. Stephanie nodded in agreement.

"That… is absolutely correct," John grinned. "In fact, she's going to be the one to make your life miserable when I say this next part."

"What? How?" Seth's confusion would have been adorable if I wasn't suddenly concerned. John was right about the Authority not being Seth's family. He was expendable if he became too troublesome, which was why I worked so hard to keep him in line.

John didn't answer right away. "Everyone knows I'm big on respect," he said. I snorted. He smiled too broadly. "I give credit where credit is due, and you, Mr. Rollins, are exceptional in this ring."

"Damn straight I am." He patted the title on his waist and then the one he held over his shoulder.

"Rollins, shut up," I whispered. "He's setting a trap."
"Ok, but he's not wrong."

"For the love of…" I shook my head.

John was still smiling too broadly. "You are one of the stupidest men I've ever encountered. And one of the most conceited egomaniacs ever, which considering the people I've met, that's saying a lot." I had to wonder if he counted himself in that group.

It was everything I had been saying, but hearing it coming from John made me irritable. "Get to the point," Seth snapped.

"You actually believe that you're friends with the Authority! You think that you've got their back, so they have yours, that it's like the Shield, but nothing could be further from the truth!"

I balled up my fists. "Watch what you say, John, when you speak of the Shield. This is a very steep cliff you've stepped up to."

"I'm sorry," John said to me, "but why do you think they chose Seth over Roman, or Dean, or even you? Because they knew he was the kind of guy to stab his friends in the back and do what's best for business."

The chant started softly, but grew quickly until the whole arena was saying it. I felt my body begin to tremble as the memory flooded my mind. *You sold out! You sold out! You sold out!*

Seth. *You sold out!* Holding a chair. *You sold out!* Standing behind Roman. *You sold out!* Sending that chair right into unsuspecting Roman's back.

"Shut up…" I whispered. "Please… just shut up…" My vision became blurry from tears as I looked at John, taking a step towards him, anger coursing through my veins.

*You sold out! You sold out! You sold out!*

I could see it clearly. John was a tall man, but not so tall that I couldn't punch him right in his nose.

*You sold out! You sold out! You sold out!*

With enough force, maybe even break it again.

*You sold out! You sold out! You sold out!*

I felt a calm wash over me. I only had to raise my arm and--

"SHUT UP!" Seth screamed into the microphone behind me. I felt him grab my hand and pull me back, away from John. "I thought I told you to get to the goddamn point?!!"

"The point! Ah, well, this is where it gets interesting. The point is that the Authority does what is best for business, not what's best for Seth Rollins. No, they see you and how they can use you. It's why they chose you. They use you, and they will take and take until there is nothing left and then they will toss you to the side. You don't even have to take it from me. Ask Randy Orton. Ask Dave Batista. Ask Kane. I bet anything that neither Stephanie nor Hunter or any of you can say how he's doing right now."

I bit my lip. *He's doing very well, you jerk.* Whether or not my bosses knew, I had no idea, but I wasn't about to call them out on it.

"And hell, in a few months, ask the newest flavor of the month, *Seth Rollins.*" John looked right at
Seth when he said that. I felt Seth's hand squeeze around mine. I hadn't realized that he was still holding onto me until that moment. "See, I don't like the Authority, and they don't like me, but we know exactly what the other is about and I don't buy into any of their bullcrap, but you... you've eaten up every lie they've fed you. You believe it. That's just sad, man. Even sadder, I'm about to prove it to you. Stephanie." He turned to our boss.

"Yes?"

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but didn't you say at Night of Champions, every title will be defended?"

My eyes narrowed as I scowled at John. Damn it! I had heard it, just as everyone else had, but I had hoped that no one would realize what it meant for someone holding two championships. I had hoped John wouldn't invoke his rematch. "Two matches in the same night..." I said. "Shit..."

"And," John continued, "I just so happen to be owed a rematch..."

"Nonononono," Seth protested. "That's not going to happen."

John shrugged. "Well, if the Authority has your back, then it won't. But if it's really about what's best for business, then..." He smiled his stupid, condescending smile and turned to Stephanie again. "I'd like to invoke my rematch clause. So, what's it going to be? It's a one word answer. Yes or no, do I get my rematch at Night of Champions?"

"No, Stephanie, please," I begged. "Do not give him what he wants."

"Two championship matches in one night, come on, Steph. That's not right!" Seth said.

"I'm so sorry, you guys..." Stephanie said, and she did look quite apologetic. "But, yes. John, you have your rematch."

"WHAT?! NO!" Seth yelled, as John's music began to play. He raised his hands in victory and left the ring. "Steph, come on! You can't!"

I couldn't believe it. I knew they didn't care about Seth, but to do this to him... the stakes were raised beyond belief. It was possible for him to win and retain both, but the chances were low, especially if he was more concerned about his statue.

John reached the top of the ramp, turned around and raised his hands in the air again. His upbeat music was interrupted by low tones of Sting's. My heart fell as Sting came out to stand with John in solidarity.

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Smackdown - September 3, 2015

"So... what are you wearing?"

"Are you seriously asking me this?" I had my phone on speaker as I tried on different outfits. I had Smackdown playing on the tv, on mute. Dean had messaged me earlier to let me know he and Roman had a match against the New Day, if I was interested in watching. I definitely was. "I thought you wanted to talk about strategy?"

"Well if you're not going to video chat with me, I have to ask!" Seth said in a huff. "I'd rather help you get ready for your... date, than think about Sting and Cena. At least it's not a handicap match, or a triple threat... so I guess there's that..."
"Whatever. I'm not video chatting because I'm changing clothes constantly. You'd end up seeing more of my bare skin than the outfits, and that's not something that's going to happen." I pulled off the fleecy top and exchanged it for an elegant blouse my mother had bought me ages ago. It was loose, and not in a complimentary way. "Ugh, this is hopeless."

"Come on, at least let me see the choices. I'm very fashionable."

I snorted. "You wear either Blackcraft and jeans or workout gear constantly. I'm not taking fashion advice from you."

"Hey, that's a choice I make. Just because I have good tastes, doesn't mean I can't be comfortable. I help Marek with my opinions and he's the Fashionista."

He had a point, and he did look really good in everything he wore, but I didn't want to admit it. "Fine. If it will shut you up, I'll show you the two best outfits. I'm not completely sold on either of them, but they're way better than everything else. And I'm getting a second opinion from my other friends."

"Fair enough. Are you going to do sexy poses? I need forewarnings on this."

"Idiot." I hung up the phone, took a picture of the two best outfits I had, laid out on the bed, and sent it to him. The first was a dark grey, sleeveless dress that went down to my ankles. Very elegant, and a little bit sexy. The second was a sky blue sundress that made me feel like a teenager, but in a good way. Both were perfectly acceptable, but I had misgivings about wearing either. I got a text message back almost immediately.

SR: YOU HAVE TO BE WEARING THEM.

Me: Make me

SR: >:( how am I supposed to give an informed opinion if I can't see how they fit on you?!

Ugh, I hated that he had a point. Why was he making so many good points tonight?

Me: fine. whatever. Give me a few minutes.

SR: k. do good poses.

I sent him a picture of my middle finger.

SR: at least smile!

He had attached a picture of himself smiling his goofy grin as an example. I laughed at that and saved it to his contact info on my phone.

It took me more than a few minutes to put both outfits on and take pictures that I was ok with showing him. I went ahead and sent them to Nattie, Lana, and Paige as well, letting them know the situation.

SR: ok, got them. I'll call you when I make a decision.

Me: Whatever.

I turned the volume up on the tv. Lana had mentioned earlier she and Dolph had been invited onto Miz TV to talk about the whole "Summer Rae in Dolph's locker room" thing, so I was surprised to
see Summer Rae come out. "Ugh, Miz is just trying to stir the pot. Again." I kept watching, as Summer spewed lie after lie, that she and Dolph had had a moment in his locker room on Monday that had turned into guilt because Summer was so dedicated to Rusev.

"It's so obvious that Summer is setting Dolph up!" I said to no one in particular. Lana had said she understood, but she wasn't exactly the most level headed person when she got angry, and this whole situation definitely had her seeing red. My phone beeped.

**NattieCat: Grey. Looks really elegant and classic.**

**Me: Thanks, Nattie :)**

I wasn't surprised when Dolph and Lana came out to confront Summer, but I was surprised when Summer showed Lana an old video clip from more than a year ago, of Summer kissing Dolph, and Dolph kissing back. And then Lana attacked Summer. Dolph tried to separate them, but Lana pushed him away. "Oh, shit…"

My phone beeped. It was a text from Paige, saying to go with the dark grey outfit. I sent her a thank you when my phone rang. It was Lana. I muted the tv again before answering.

"Hey!" I said. "I just saw the Miz TV segment… That looked… rough."

"Yes, vell, I do not vish to speak of it. Maybe later. Dis outfits, for your pastor man, yes?"

"Yeah. He's not a pastor yet though. So what do you think?" My call waiting beeped in my ear. A quick glance told me it was Seth, but he would have to wait.

"Dark grey dress. Shows off yur curves better, yet stays modest. Is good for first date."

"Paige and Nattie said the same thing. I'm kind of taking a poll."

"Oh? Who else?"

"Just Rollins. He was being insistent on helping, because he's avoiding thinking about his upcoming matches."

"... Is dat vat he tol you?"

I didn't know what to make of that. My phone beeped. Seth was calling a second time. "Yeah, why?"

"No, no, is nothing. Just… a little odd. Vell, he is red-blooded man. He vill choose grey dress. I am sure."

My phone beeped again. "I'll wear it even if he says the other one. Hey, Lana, I'll need to call you back. He keeps calling me. I don't think he'll stop until I answer."

"Dat's ok. I hav to drive to hotel soon. See you on Monday."

"Yeah, see you on Monday." I switched the calls before Seth hung up and called a fourth time. "Oh my god, why are you calling so much?!"

"I told you I was going to call! Why weren't you answering?!" he demanded.

I rolled my eyes. "I sent the photos to Lana and Paige. Paige texted me, but Lana called me, so I was talking to her."
"... oh."

"That's all you got? 'Oh.' I told her you were being a nuisance and that I'd have to talk to her later, which considering what happened to her earlier today..." I sighed. "Do better, Rollins."

He grumbled. "I'm sorry I interrupted your phone call with Lana," he muttered.

"Ok. Thank you. That wasn't so hard, was it? So, oh great and fashionable one, which dress do you think I should wear on my first date with Richard?"

He was silent.

"You have no idea, do you."

"No! I mean, yes, I do! Sort of. You look really good in both of them, so it's hard to decide." He fell silent again. I watched the match between Bo Dallas and R-Truth while he thought about it. The video clip from the Raw after SummerSlam was played, of Bo's interaction with Brock. R-Truth was laughing his ass off, which just pissed off Bo. "Ok, I got it."

"Oh good. Because I thought you were supposed to have your decision before calling."

"Brat."

"Jerk."

"You like it. You find it amusing."

"Only sometimes. Now is one of those times," I said with a laugh. "So, which one?"

"Dark grey one. It's modest, but also... tantalizing. Might be too much for preacher boy, actually."

I laughed again. "Yeah, well, the sundress might be too childish for him. I look like I'm twelve in it."

"No, you don't," he said. "Maybe...he might think that, but, I don't. Wear it to Raw on Monday. See how it goes. If it feels right, then wear it to your next date."

"I'll think about it." It was surreal, having this conversation with him. Maybe, just maybe, I was finally getting over my feelings for him. Maybe I was ready to move on.

"If we had had that practice date, I would have said to wear the sundress. And would have definitely taken you dancing somewhere, because wow. That's the kind of dress you show off in. It's just that good on you."

My cheeks burst into flames at the thought of being held in his arms in a slow dance. Pretty certain that wasn't what he meant, but that's where my brain went. Maybe I wasn't as over him as I had originally thought.
Good news! I have a twitter account now, if anyone wants to contact me, for any reason. My tumblr and twitter names are on my profile, and I welcome messages in both places.

Raw - September 7, 2015

"You cheated," I wheezed, my chest heaving as I struggled to catch my breath. I was on my back, Seth was above me, his body covering mine and grinning as he pushed his hair behind his ear. It had come loose from his messy man bun.

"No, I caught you unaware. I'm the champ, dollface. I'm really good at what I do."

"Fantastic. Don't call me dollface. Can you get off me now?" It was really annoying to lose yet another sparring match to Seth, and I was ready to end the session.

"What'sa matter?" he asked in a sing-song voice. "Getting horny?" His smirk was too much. I narrowed my eyes. Smug asshole.

Like a flash, I grabbed Seth by the arms. My legs came up, I caught him around his shoulders, and he was suddenly in a vise. I wrenched my body, flipping him. He was so shocked that I had done anything, it was easy. Now that he was on his back and I was basically sitting on his chest, I smiled down at him. "No, are you?"

He just stared at me.

Rolling my eyes, I let go of him, got up, and looked around the training room. I hadn't wanted to admit it, but the position he had had me in was a little too intimate for me. I had been thinking about what he said concerning the sundress and dancing since Thursday and it was all a bit too much. I drank deeply from the bottle of ice cold water I had brought with me, trying to cool my body and my thoughts. Looking around, I saw there were a few people in the next room, using the weights and cardio machines. It was early, but we pretty much had the place to ourselves. Walking over to my gym bag, I said with a sigh, "Guess I owe you dinner now. Again." We had had a standing bet since the aborted SummerSlam dinner bet: whoever lost in practice had to buy the other dinner and from wherever they wanted. I had yet to make Seth buy me dinner.

"No, that's ok. I think this should count as a win for you today," Seth said. I turned around. He was still on the mats, but he was sitting up, curled up on himself.

"You ok? I didn't hurt you, did I?" I asked, taking a step towards him.

He held his hand up, stopping me in my tracks. "No, you didn't. I'm ok. Go start your cool down. I'll be with you in a bit. I just… need a moment."

"You sure?" He seemed like he was in pain.

"Yeah, just… embarrassed." He looked up at me and gave me a tight smile. "Been a while since
someone surprised me like that. Go on, don't want your muscles freezing up or anything."
"Ok… if you're sure…" He nodded. "See you in a bit."

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"I bet he popped a boner," Paige said later.

I stared at her, then asked with annoyance, "Do you ever think of anything else?" We were sitting backstage, enjoying some brief free time before we had to get ready for the show.

"Where you and the Architect are concerned? No. It's funny and fun." She grinned. Becky and Charlotte joined us. "You're way too easy to tease. But fine. I'll move on… Have you seen the Bellas lately?"

"I don't usually pay attention to them. Why?" I took a long drag from my water bottle.

"We're just trying to keep tabs on them, especially after my petition to the Authority to move our match up," Charlotte said. "Nikki is… That 'Longest Reigning Divas Champion' thing is really important to her. I don't trust her to not try something. You know?"

I shook my head. "I am the wrong person to ask. I don't associate with the Divas division much. Rollins takes up too much of my time now, and before that, it was rough just keeping up with Roman and Dean."

"But you do the same ting you did for tem for Set now, don'cha?" Becky asked. "An der's only one of 'im."

"Sort of… being Rollins' manager is a lot more involved than it was being Roman and Dean's. He has a lot more on his plate then they did, and being my brothers' manager was more cleaning up any messes or apologizing to people they upset. Not all of the people, but the ones who needed the apology. For Rollins, it's a lot more time management, making sure he doesn't piss off people in the first place, which is a full time job on its own."


I shrugged. "Not as tough as being wrestler, so if I can alleviate any stress for them, I try to. I mean, that's pretty much a good description of my job. Oh, shoot, I gotta go and change for the show. See you girkles later!"

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"You look nice."

I looked up at Seth. We were walking towards gorilla position, since Seth was going to be starting of the show. "Thanks. I feel weird wearing a skirt. Everyone keeps looking at me like I've grown a third head or something."

"It's just… different. You usually wear pants. But it looks good," he stressed. I did rather like how it flared out when I spun around, and it matched Seth's newest shirt, black with a bright yellow imprint of his logo and name. The black, distressed skirt had layers of lace with yellow gold lines scattered about. I wore tall, black boots that I had laced with yellow gold laces. It had been really cool at first, but now I was worried that it was too much.

"Yeah, I considered wearing the sundress, but it didn't seem right for work, or as your
'representative', so I went with this instead. But… Is it weird that we match so much?" I asked him.
"What do you mean?" He grabbed a water bottle from a refreshment table.
"I mean, we're both wearing the same shirt, and my skirt matches it, and your pants match it. So we
are matching. Isn't that kinda weird?"
"What? No. It's awesome. Your shirt is fitted and cut to make it even better. Mine is straight up,
which is also cool. We're like a salt and pepper set."
I made a face. "That is not a selling point. Who's the salt in this analogy, because I do not want to
be pepper. Makes my nose itch just thinking about it. Maybe I should change…"
"No. You're staying like that. We look awesome, and that's that. We should do this more often
actually."
"Maybe…" I thought I caught a glimpse of Sting going down a hallway, but that direction led to
the parking lot, so it didn't make sense for him to be going there. Must have been my imagination.
"Hey," Seth said, grabbing my attention before I could think too much on Sting. "There's a show
coming up next month that I want to go to, for Mayday Parade. Maybe you could come with me? I
think you'll like them. You could wear the sundress then."
"Won't I stick out like a sore thumb in that scene?"
Seth just shrugged. "You'll look awesome, and that's all that matters for fashion, right?"
"Uh… I guess? I'll think about it."
**********
I was only half-listening to Seth as he ranted at the audience from the middle of the ring. He was
going on and on about Sting again. I had taken a seat on the top turnbuckle, taking care to not
accidentally flash the audience, and was looking out at the various signs fans had brought in. Why
is your hair sooooooo WET? had me laughing. There was a We Want Nattie sign, which made me
smile, and reminded me to give her a call later. I had visited with her and Tyson a few times when I
was in the area, but not for very long and I missed her. I had heard rumors that she'd be returning at
the end of the month, but nothing was confirmed yet.
"--a statue," Seth was saying, "a statue of my likeness, gracing the stage or sitting next to the
announcer's table every week. A statue so great that it invoked massive jealousy from a certain
face painted FREAK-- "
Seth stopped to collect himself.
"You ok there, champ?" I called out. "Need me to rub your back until you calm down? Maybe get
you a fresh diaper? Because you're acting like a baby over this." I was cheerful, but truthfully, I was
more annoyed than angry at his dedication to getting his statue back. His tendency to fixate on
things could be considered a strength or a flaw, depending on what it was focused on.
He glared at me, but I just smiled sweetly at him. Seth broke a little and almost gave me a smile
back, but then turned back before I could see if he did or didn't. He kept ranting for a little bit, but
then the caw of a crow was heard, and the monitor over the ramp flickered to life. Sting was there.
I wasn't sure who I was more annoyed at in that moment, Sting or Seth.


"Oh! Why, hello, Seth. How are you?" he asked, in mock surprise.

"Sting! Get down here right now and tell me where my statue is!" Seth shouted. I just rolled my eyes.

"Oh, don't you worry your pretty little head. I'm taking good care of it." Sting backed away to show the statue of Seth. He pulled out a feather duster and pretended to clean it. "Though, if you really want it. All you have to do is find me. It's here, I'm here, so come join us, Seth." His smile was a little eerie, but then I noticed something in the background.

That's… That's John Cena's face… It was huge. And familiar. It was easy to know what it was from. Seth's face, as well as many other of the superstars, was done up the same way to display on the sides of the various trucks that carried the equipment from arena to arena. My mind was racing a little. If that really was Sting I saw earlier, and that's from one of the trucks, then that means that Sting… is in the parking garage. I bit my lip, unsure if I should tell Seth or not. On one hand, if I told him, he would be so happy and maybe relax a bit. On the other, the statue needed to go. If Sting kept it, maybe it was for the best. The caw of a crow signalled the end of Sting's video transmission.

"I am not afraid of you!" Seth was shouting to the now empty screen. "I am not--"


He gave the crowd a withering look. That didn't stop them. I noticed one guy give Sheamus a small shrug and say You kinda do. Ouch. Honestly, while I didn't think the braided beard did him any favors, the mohawk was pretty cool.

"Is it because of yer two matches at Night of Champions?"

"No! No no no," Seth said insistently. "I am not worried about John Cena. I am not worried about Sting. I am worried about my statue, so if you would get out of my way, I'm going to go hunt down--"

"Statue? Yer worried about a statue? Do you realize how stupid you sound?"


"I do NOT look stupid!!" Sheamus screamed.

"Look, they think you look stupid, I happen to think you look like Ronald McDonald with a bad haircut--"

"You leave my family outta this!!"

Seth and I both did a double take at Sheamus. Isn't Sheamus Irish? I thought McDonald was a Scottish name… Or was it MacDonald… Never could keep that stuff straight… Either way, the insult few right over Sheamus' tall hair.

"What?" Seth asked, then shook his head. "Never mind. What is your point for being out here?!"
"My point… Set, is right. Here." He held up his Money In The Bank briefcase. Seth's face hardened with anger and hatred. I jumped down from the ring post.

"Uh… Sheamus, sorry, but this might actually be one of the worst times to bring this up," I said as delicately as possible.

"You stay outta tis!" I backed away from him with my hands up and towards Seth as Sheamus continued. "T'is is my point. And I might jus make my point… tonight. Or I could make it on Smackdown. Or… at Night of Champions. Because, Set, should you make it t'rough your first two matches, you will not be making it t'rough a t'ird." Sheamus grinned at Seth before leaving the ring.

"Sonavabitch!" Seth yelled, throwing the microphone down.

"Hey," I said, going to his side. "It's going to be ok. We'll get through thi--"

"Hunter."

I blinked at him in surprise. "Uh, ok?"

"We have to find Hunter. He'll know what to do." Seth looked towards the screen again. Sheamus' music and graphics were playing, but I suspected that Seth didn't see them.

"Ok, but…" I bit my lip, deciding to just tell him. "But I think I know where--"

"Come on, I'm sure Hunter is here in the building." He rolled out of the ring, not even waiting for me.

It was very awkward being left like that, but I made my way to the back. I didn't see Seth at all, but after asking a few crew members, I soon found him in Stephanie's office.

"Knock, knock," I said, lightly rapping on the open door.

"Come on in," Stephanie said, looking irritably at Seth and a bit grateful at my presence. Oh no, what did he say now… "Look, Seth, like I said, I have a plan."

"Yeah, but I would just feel so much better if I could talk to Hunter." I wanted to jab Seth in the ribs, but I was pretty sure he'd have no idea what I was trying to convey. He certainly didn't notice how irritated Stephanie was over the fact that he wasn't listening to her, or wanted to hear her plan. It was probably a good one, too. "He's the Cerebral Assassin, it's his thing, you know… Is he here? I thought I saw his car earliier…"

We both felt the presence behind us at the same time and turned in almost perfect synchronicity. "Hey, boss…" I said, backing up a little. His aura was feeling a bit dangerous, so I hid behind Seth a little. "How's it going?"

"Good, good," he said cheerfully. His aura didn't change. "So, Seth, you don't think Stephanie can handle the problem?"

"What?! No, nonono, it's not that at all." I wanted to roll my eyes so badly. It was clear as day now, Seth didn't trust anyone other than Hunter with dealing with Sting. "I just thought… you know, we could all come up with a plan… together. Yeah, together! As a… as a family." He gave his goofy little grin.

"Um, actually," I said, speaking up a bit. "I think I know whe--"
"Like we always do!" Seth said, speaking over me. I huffed at that and jabbed him in the side.

Hunter chuckled darkly. "Well, what difference does it make, the situation is just... the situation. You can handle it, right? 'Cause you're the Man."

"Right... I mean, right! I'm the Man. I can't let the world think this is getting to me. It's not."

"No, of course it isn't, Seth," Stephanie said, patting him on the shoulder. She was smiling an empty smile at him, but he didn't seem to notice.

"So... what are we going to do about tonight? About Sting and Sheamus--"

Hunter sighed heavily. "Well, you don't have to worry about Sheamus. He has a match with Randy tonight."

"Oh. Oh! Ok!" Seth looked really happy. I was just waiting for the other shoe to drop. Hunter and Stephanie could be counted on to have each other's backs, and Seth had just insulted Stephanie by not listening to her plan. "Good, so I can focus on finding Sting... and my statue..."

"Weeeeellllllllll," Hunter said, "Actually, you're not going to be worried about Sting either."

Seth frowned. "I'm not...?"

"Nope. You need to focus on the fact that you have two matches at Night of Champions." Seth's jaw clenched. He wasn't looking at Hunter, but I saw that small smile on our boss's face.

*He's enjoying Seth's misery...*

Hunter's smile grew wider. "And so, to help you prepare for that, you will be having *two* matches tonight."

"Two?! But... can't we talk about this?"

"Are you questioning my plan, Seth?" Hunter asked, all humor in his voice gone.

"No, no, nononono, I can... I can do two matches..." He didn't sound confident at all.

"Good to hear. Your first match will be a Champion versus Champion match, against the Intercontinental Champion, Ryback." Seth grimaced. I didn't think it was such a bad idea since the last time they had had a match, Seth had been sick and unable to complete it. "And your second match will be more of a Champions versus Challengers. You'll be tagging with the new tag team champions, the New Day, against their challengers, the Prime Time Players, and their tag partner, John Cena."

The muscle under Seth's eye twitched. He turned to Stephanie. "Hey, don't look at me. My plan was to find Sting, but Hunter's plan is loads better, right?"

Seth nodded grimly. "Right... right."

"About that, Stephanie," I said, speaking up a bit. "I--"

"Seth," Hunter said, cutting me off. "You know what I like about my plan?"

*The fact that Seth gets punished?* I thought. Seth shook his head.

"It's that you get to go out there and show them. You show them *exactly* why you are the Man."
Seth nodded, seeing whatever wisdom he deemed Hunter to have. "Yeah… Yeah! I'm the Man! I'm the…" He hesitated slightly. "I'M THE MAN. YEAH!"

"Atta, boy. Now go on. Get out of here. Get your head in the right space. We'd like to talk to your manager a bit."

There was a flash of worry on Seth's face, but he left after I nodded at him. "Yes, boss?" I said to Hunter.

"What were you going to say about Stephanie's plan?" he asked.

"Oh, just that I think I know where the statue is."

Hunter arched a brow at me. "You do?"

"Well, I'm not certain since I haven't checked it myself, but I thought I saw Sting earlier, and then in his video, I noticed some stuff in the background… long story short, I believe he's hiding out in the parking garage, with the equipment trucks."

Hunter and Stephanie exchanged glances. I had a Bad Feeling that I shouldn't have told them.

"And I assume you haven't told Seth yet?" Hunter asked, crossing his arms over his chest. It was a bit intimidating. I stood as tall as I could. This wasn't anything new. I had stared down Hunter before, I would likely do it again. I felt a calm settle over me. He doesn't scare me. Much.

"No, sir. I haven't. Yet."

Hunter relaxed. "Good. That's good. Don't tell him. He needs to focus on his matches, not that statue. We'll send someone to investigate."

"Sir, I really think it would be better to tell--"

He placed his hands on my shoulders firmly. "Listen to me very closely. Whatever you do, do not tell Seth. He will go after that statue, and he will fall to Sting. Sting is in his head right now, and the last thing we want is for them to encounter each other."

I frowned. I did not believe that was the real reason he didn't want me to tell Seth for even a second.

"I see," Hunter said, not letting go of me. "Let me put this another way. If you tell him, I will make sure the Wyatts find your brothers in a long dark hallway, alone and with no one around to help them." My blood ran cold and I couldn't find my voice to protest. "You got that?"

I nodded slowly.

"Good girl. Now, if it makes it easier, you can take the rest of the night off."

**********

"Hey!" I turned to see Paige.

"Hey, yourself," I said, giving her a smile I wasn't really feeling. "How'd your match go?"

"Terrible. Naomi jumped on the apron, then the anime brat got me from behind. I'll get her. One way or another. She shook her head. "You ok? You don't look so good."
"Yeah, I…" I saw Seth in the distance, yelling at a crew member. *He's still thinking about that statue, isn't he?* As much as I hated it, and wished to see it go, getting it back would mean the world to Seth, and maybe he'd be able to focus on the task at hand. But I couldn't do that to Roman and Dean. I'd have to find the middle ground in between. Somehow. "Well, no, actually. I'm not ok. But I will be. I have to get back to work."

"Ok," Paige said, giving me a hug. "Drinks after?"

"Definitely."

**********

I didn't watch Roman and Dean's match against the Ascension. Seth was stalking the halls and I was trying to get him to calm down. It wasn't going well. I heard later that while they had won, the Wyatts had shown up on the video screen above the ramp with a warning to Roman and Dean. Anyone who was seen helping them was fair game. I shuddered at the thought, and hating that Roman had been right to cut ties with me.

**********

"You don't look ready for this," I told Seth. He growled at me. "You have to stop focusing on the statue." *For your own sake.*

Seth punched an empty equipment box. "I can't. All I want to do is scour this entire damn building and find that asshole so I can take back what is rightfully mine!"

I sighed heavily. "Rollins… Look, what if, right after your last match, we go and look for it. Together. Ok?"

He grunted, not liking my suggestion.

"I'm sorry, but it's the best I can offer right now. Hunter and Stephanie will have both our heads if you deviate from Hunter's plan. Like it or not, you asked him for one, and he gave it to you."

"Should have listened to Stephanie…"

"Yes, actually, you *should* have," I snapped at him. He huffed and crossed his arms over his chest. "You *should* have heard her out, and if the plan wasn't great, well, then you could have asked Hunter, but no! You completely ignored her idea, ignored me trying to tell you-- You ignored both of us and that was just plain rude." He looked a bit apologetic at that.

"Sorry…"

I punched him, then hugged him. He gripped me tightly to him. "It's ok. Since you apologized. But I'm punching you to begin with next time."

"Tch, you don't punch that hard."

"Fine, I'll use a kendo stick."

He paused at that. "Ok, that's a better threat."

I laughed at that and pushed away from him. "So, do we have a deal? Focus on your matches, and then right after, we hunt down Sting and your statue?"

"Eh, fine…" he grumbled, "I'll *try.*" It was the best I was going to get out of him.
I stood at ringside, holding onto both of Seth's championships. The bell rang and he and Ryback squared off.

"You're not going to get away so easily this time," Ryback promised. Seth grinned, and promptly rolled out of the ring. "Get back here!"

The referee had to pull Ryback away from the ropes as he tried to get to Seth. Seth walked around the corner of the ring towards me.

"Rollins, come on, get back in the ring."

He shook his head, his mouth set in a tight frown. "I changed my mind. I don't want any part of this. This is an unfair---"

"It is what it is, ok!?" I tried to think quickly, to find a way to get him to stick to Hunter's plan. "You have to deal with it, because come Night of Champions, you won't be able to just walk away. And... and... and this is good way to do it. It's... it's training! Doesn't matter if you win or lose, this is just training. Ok?"

He huffed, but climbed the steps and got back into the ring before the ref got to the ten count. The match continued and... it did not go well for Seth. Ryback dominated for the majority of the time they spent in the ring. By the time Seth actually got into the swing of things, he was reminding himself, "I'm the Man. I'm the Man!" at regular intervals, the all too familiar caw of a crow was heard.

"Seth! Seth, my man, what are you doing?" Sting asked from the video screen.

"Rollins! Don't listen to him!" I shouted. Seth glared at the screen. I jumped up on the apron and waved my hands in front of his face. "ROLLINS."

"Why on earth are you in the ring, Seth?" I didn't turn around. I kept my eyes on Seth, willing him to pay attention to me and not Sting. "Don't you want your statue? We're here.... we're waiting. See you soon, I hope."

"Give me my statue!" Seth shouted at the screen. He leaned heavily on the ropes as he yelled.

"Rollins, please!" I put my hand on his arm. He didn't take any notice. I gave up and jumped down to the floor when I saw the ref heading over towards me. Seth stared at the screen for a few more moments before turning back to Ryback, who was on his back in the center of the ring. He reached for him, to pull him up, I suppose, but Ryback was quick as a whip and rolled Seth up into a Small Package. "Rollins!" He struggled frantically.

One. Two. Three. Ding ding ding!

Seth had lost.

Ryback didn't stick around long once he won, leaving Seth alone in the ring. I walked up the steel steps and ducked in between the ropes. "Rollins..." I said softly, kneeling beside him. He looked dumbfounded, unable to comprehend what had just happened. "Hey..."

The crow caw sounded again. Seth and I both turned to look at the video screen. His statue was there. Alone. We got to our feet. I was confused, and could only assume Seth felt the same.
"Where's--" Sting popped up from below to stand in front of the statue. He smiled. Then ducked down again. "Uh... what?" I said. Seth didn't seem to understand either. Sting popped up again, smiled, ducked down. The third time, he didn't smile. He just looked at a mask he held in his hand. A mask that looked an awful lot like the painted design on his face. "Oh... oh no..." I looked over at Seth, who seemed to be realizing the same thing I just had.

"No... no... no no no no nonononono!" he screamed as Sting danced around the statue and carefully placed the mask over Seth's bronzed face. "You're defacing my property!!"

"He's not... we can take the mask off very easily," I pointed out.

Seth wasn't having any of it. "Come on, dollface! We're going after him right now!"

"Shit..." I said, and followed Seth out of the ring and up the ramp, his championship belts held tightly in my arms.

**********

"Where is he?!" Seth screamed as he stormed down the hallway. "Sting!! Get out here!! Show yourself!! Give me my statue!!"

"Rollins, please calm down! You're not going to--"

"OoooOOoooooHHHHhhhh!!!!!" another voice cried out. We turned to see the New Day approaching us. Big E had been the one to shout. "Don't you dare be sour, Seth Rollins!"

"Oh, no," Seth muttered, rolling his head in impatience. "Not these guys."

"You are stuck in the past, my son," Xavier said, holding his trombone like a pointer stick. "You have to get past this. You still have another match tonight." He was smiling so widely, I was surprised his teeth didn't fall out.

"But never fear!" Kofi said. "For you are tagging with the..."

"New Day!" they all said in unison, then broke out in giggles right after.

"Why..." Seth groaned.

"Because!" Big E shouted joyfully. "New... Day rocks!" Clap clap. "New... Day rocks!" Xavier and Kofi joined in on the clapping. "New... Day rocks!" Clap clap.

"Why... why did I ask why?" Seth wailed. They were still going at it. "Guys! Guys!" They stopped and stared. They were not looking at Seth, as far as I could tell, which was weird. "Look, I appreciate the... whatever this is. But I've got a lot on my plate right now. You just don't get it, no one's made a statue of-- What?! What is it??" All three members of the New Day were pointing behind us.

Seth and I turned in unison to see Edge and Christian, former tag team champions that Seth had had a run in with before, when he had been Mr. Money In The Bank and the Authority had been put out of business. Due to a stipulation at Survivor Series 2014, only John Cena could bring them back.

Edge had been forced to retire due to a neck injury a few years prior to that, and Seth has used him to force John's hand, had threatened to Curb Stomp him onto the steel Money In The Bank briefcase and turn him into a quadriplegic, if John didn't give in and return the Authority to power. John had given in, but Seth had attempted to break Edge's neck anyway. It was one of the few
times I was grateful for John, because he jumped into the ring and tackled Seth before he could do anything he would regret later on.

"Hey, Seth!" Edge said, smiling dangerously. "Been a while. In fact, I think the last time I saw you, you had your little goon squad cheapshot the both of us, and then threatened to break my neck so that I never walked again. Remember that? Fun times." He and Christian peered down at me. I was standing in front of Seth, the only barrier between him and the two angry men. "You're new."

I automatically held my hand out and introduced myself. "Manager to Seth Rollins, nice to meet you."

Edge's eyebrows went up in surprise. He took my hand and shook it firmly. "Nice grip."

"What's a nice girl like you doing with a chump like him?" Christian asked, shaking my hand next. "I wonder that a lot actually." They both laughed at that.

"Hey!" Seth growled. "Enough with the small talk. Look, I know what I did to you, Edge, but I'd think that of all people, you'd understand doing what it takes to get something done." I rolled my eyes, but then stopped and turned to Seth when he coughed. I did not like the sound of it.

"Are you ok?" I whispered to him and raised my hand to his forehead. Not that that would tell me much. His temperature was running higher than normal since he had just finished his match.

"I'm fine," he said, swatting my hand away. I turned back to Edge and Christian in annoyance.

"Oh, I understand, Seth," Edge said. "It's just… you didn't get the job done then." He stepped forward and I scooted to the side a little, but I still felt more than a bit crowded. "So why don't you try right… now?" That dangerous smile was back.

I'd be lying if I said the thought of Seth having a match with Edge didn't thrill me as a wrestling fan, but I knew it wasn't possible. There was a reason he was retired, and it wasn't for a lack of passion for wrestling. Seth, on the other hand, seemed to forget that fact.

"What…? That's…" Seth said, sounding unsure of himself. "Maybe I… I just… I have a lot on my plate right now!!" he shouted in their faces. He grabbed my arm and pulled me away. "Sting!! WHERE ARE YOU??!??!!"

I dully noticed that Xavier was challenging Christian to a music battle and wondered how that would turn out.

**********

"Rollins," I said. "It's almost time for your tag match." We had been unsuccessful in finding Sting. Seth had had to be ordered by Hunter to stop and get ready for his second match.

"I should be looking for Sting, not getting ready for this match. This is some fucking bullshit," he muttered. He was doing push ups to vent some frustration.

"Yeah, a bit." I sat down next to his little area. I had been holding onto both title belts for him again, and had hooked them over my chest in an X. It was kind of cool, like I was going to war. "But… like we said earlier, Hunter and Stephanie agreed on this plan. You agreed to this plan. Please, just try not to think about it so much. If you want… If you want, I will go and look for it. While you have your match."
He stopped mid-push. "You'd do that for me?" The dark circles under his eyes were more evident in the bright lights of his locker room. I made a mental note to make sure he got to sleep early tonight.

"Yeah. If it will get you to focus on the match. You already lost once tonight. You're going to be completely insufferable if you lose again," I said with a small smile.

He snorted, but laughed and went back to the push ups. "Nah, I can't ask you to do that. What if the Wyatts found you alone? I'd never forgive myself."

"True. And Ro and Dee wouldn't forgive you either."

"Eh, not worried about them. Look, I'll do my best, but I can't just be *not* angry about this. If I knew where he was keeping it…" Seth growled a little. "Right after the match, I'm going to find that son of a bitch and make him pay."

I tried a different tactic. "What do you think he's going to do with it? I mean, seriously, is he going to cart it around on the road just to torment you?"

"Fuck if I know. I just hope I get to him before anyone else does."

I nodded and watched him. I wanted to tell him so badly about what I had seen, but how could I betray Roman and Dean? I didn't know how Hunter and Stephanie would find out, only that I was sure that they would.

"Hey… Seth?" I said quietly.

He looked up at me sharply. "Yeah?"

"I, um… I have a hypothetical question for you. If you knew something important that would affect someone close to you, but couldn't tell that person because… um, let's say you can't tell them because someone threatened little Kevin. What would you do?"

He stared at me, then moved from the push up position into a sitting one, so that he was right in front of me. "If someone threatened my dog so that I'd stay silent?"

I nodded.

"I'd kick their ass."

I rolled my eyes. "But what if you *couldn't*? What if you weren't in a position to do anything against them? Would you stay silent to protect Kevin, or would you tell the person and then… I don't know, try to protect Kevin on your own from the fallout."

He studied me for a few moments.

"Your staring is making me uncomfortable," I said flatly.

"You've got a good face to stare at." He sighed. "Is it life or death, this hypothetical information that can't be told?" I shook my head. "Then stay quiet. Let me guess, this has something to do with Roman and Dean, doesn't it?"

"They are involved in this, yes." That technically wasn't a lie.

"I figured. Look, just… hope for the best, and do what you can to make things work out. Now, as nice a distraction as this was, I have to get back to--"
A knock at the door interrupted him. "Mr. Rollins, you're up next," a stage hand said.

**********

The tag match was not ideal. New Day were annoying with their constant taunts and trombone playing, courtesy of Xavier Woods, who was sitting out from the match. It was hard for me to get into it, but I cheered for Seth as best I could. I did not cheer for Kofi or Big E, even when they called me out on it.

"Bite me," I said back to them both.

"Saucy," Big E said. "I like it." He waggled his eyebrows at me. "You interested in going out sometime?"

Seth snarled at them. "Let her be. We've got guys to beat up."

Unfortunately, Seth just couldn't get with the program. New Day were efficient with each other, but Seth was like the oil to their water. They just didn't mix. Maybe if they had more time, or if Seth's mind wasn't occupied with the statue. When Kofi tagged in to rescue Seth from John's STF, he got AA'ed and rolled up for the pin. Seth was more than disappointed from where he sat outside the ring.

"Hey," I said, rubbing his back. "It'll be ok. And now we can go look for Sting and your statue. Um, remember when I asked ab--"

Caw!! We both turned to the ramp. Sting was on the video screen again, standing with the statue.

"Seth! Wow… not a good night for you, is it? And worst of all… you never came for your statue." Sting looked genuinely disappointed. I had to wonder what he had planned if Seth had shown up earlier. "Well, I have something to show you. Lights, please?" The area he was in was suddenly filled with fluorescent light. You could clearly see the parking garage behind him and the equipment truck with John's face on it. And a garbage truck that said APPLE VALLEY WASTE in big solid letters.

"What the…" I muttered to myself. "He couldn't possibly be thinking what I think he's thinking…"

"Wow, this really stinks!" Sting said, waving his hand in front of his face, attempting to rid himself of the alleged stench. Considering there was barely any trash in it, and what I could see wasn't rotting, I had to doubt it actually smelled that bad. "Ok, boys! Start the engine!"

"What?? No! Nononononono…" Seth said. We watched in disbelief as Sting poised himself in front of the statue, which was standing right at the edge of the platform, in front of the open garbage truck. "You can't do this!"

Sting smiled. He danced around the statue a little, teasing Seth, pretending to push it into the garbage truck a few times, until he stood up straight, laughed like it was all one big joke, and then pushed it in for real. He jumped on the side of the truck and pushed some buttons, activating the trash compactor. I watched in horror as the thick, heavy metal plate descended onto the bronze.

"NO!!" Seth screamed as the statue crunched loudly in the compactor. "Are you kidding me?! Sting!! Get out here, right now!!!"

Sting was laughing, and I was pretty sure he didn't hear Seth at all. He didn't say anything else, just waved at the camera as the truck drove away, with him hanging onto the back in maniacal glee.
"So I never got to ask you about your date." I looked up from my drink to see that Paige was grinning at me. "Come on, spill! How was it?"

"Oh, it was… nice." I smiled. I had had a better time than I expected. Richard had been the perfect gentleman.

"Just… nice?"

I nodded. "Nothing spectacular. We went to a nice restaurant, then he took me to a nice play. Not a particularly interesting one, but overall, it was… nice." It was a little dull, but also refreshing at the same time.

"Hmmm…" Paige looked thoughtful. "You going to see him again?"

"Yeah, in about three weeks, give or take. He's kind, amusing, talkative, respectful, handsome, got a good future… or at least a noble one, I guess." I looked over at Seth, who was talking to himself while pacing near the restrooms of the bar we were at. "And he's not… unavailable."

Paige followed my gaze. "Oh… oh, sweetheart… You shouldn't… I mean…" She bit her lip.

"You're trying to get over him, aren't you?"

I couldn't answer her, because I honestly didn't know.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - September 10, 2015

"Hey, are you ok?" I asked Seth, putting my hand to his forehead. He was laying down on the couch in his private locker room with his eyes closed. He looked… not at peace. And tired. He felt a little clammy, but not enough to indicate he was sick.

"M'fine," he mumbled. "Get me a coffee, please? Strong. Extra strong."

"Yeah, sure," I said, watching him. "Anything else?"

"Maybe an energy drink."

I frowned. "It's one or the other. I'm not getting you both."

He still didn't open his eyes. "Whichever is stronger, I guess. Almost wish I could have a Jolt Cola…just for the sheer amount of caffeine it has. Oh, and I like that you're wearing that skirt again. Matching set for the win." I shook my head and left in search of his beverage.

***********

I missed the first part of the show due to the fact that Seth was arguing with Hunter about a rematch with Ryback. His caffeine high had kicked in and he was just raring to go. I knew Cesaro had a match against Miz, which sounded interesting, and that Renee had an interview with Roman, Dean, and their tag partner for the night, Jimmy Uso. I really wanted to watch that, but I'd have to wait until later. I only hoped I wouldn't miss Paige's rematch against Sasha.

"No, this is a bad idea," Hunter said. "Especially as a lumberjack match." Seth had been at it for a good twenty minutes now. Hunter was clearly annoyed at his persistence.
"Have you heard what the other superstars have been saying about me?!" Seth demanded. "Especially after Monday. They think I'm weak. You said it yourself, I have to show them why I'm the man. And proving it in a rematch will be just the thing to do it. And they'll all have to be ringside if it's a lumberjack match, so there's no way they can miss it."

Hunter sighed and looked at me. "What's your take on this?"

Seth looked at me with a pleading look. I took pity on him. Logically, it was actually a good choice for him, but I knew that wasn't the real reason he wanted it. "If he wants to have the match, I think you should let him. He's going to need as much experience as possible going into Night of Champions. With a Lumberjack Match, he not only has an opponent inside the ring, but several outside as well."

Hunter shook his head. "Fine. Match granted." He picked up the phone. "Just be careful what you wish for, Seth."

**********

"Seth," Byron said, "this past Monday, you lost both of your matches as well as witnessed your statue being crushed. How are you feeling?"

The muscle under Seth's eye twitched. "That may have just been the lowest point of my professional career, and it's all thanks to one man… Sting. That statue was more than just a symbol of my greatness, Byron, it was a symbol of my status. I am a living legend. And that symbol? It is gone. Destroyed. By that face PAINTED FREAK--" Seth took a breath, his jaw clenched tightly.

"Relax, Rollins," I said. "You're going to bust a blood vessel if you keep this up."

Byron choked on a laugh while Seth gave me side eye. "You know, Sting thinks he's playing mind games with me. With me. I am the Architect. I eat mind games for breakfast."

"Part of a balanced diet."

More side eye from Seth, but he was struggling to not smile. I just knew it. I winked at him. He shoved me, but only out of the camera frame, and he was definitely smiling, though he was growly when he turned back to Byron. "Sting is just digging a hole, deeper and deeper, and come Night of Champions, I will bury him in that hole. I will crush his dreams the same way he crushed my statue. And ok, Monday was a setback. I have a lot more doubters after that night, but you know what? I am going to prove them all wrong. Tonight. 'How?' you might ask yourself. Well, I'll tell you, Byron. In my rematch tonight with Ryback, I requested that it be a Lumberjack Match, so that all those doubters can see that Monday night was a fluke. If it hadn't been for the distraction of Sting, I would have rolled up Ryback for the one, two, three. Easily! And then, I'll go on to Night of Champions, I will beat Mr. Hustle, Loyalty, Respect for the title I won off of him at SummerSlam, and I will beat Sting, proving everyone wrong when I win both of my matches! And then--" Seth stopped short. He was staring over my head. "What are you doing here?"

Confused, I looked around, but only saw the large figure as he moved past me. Sheamus… I sucked in a breath, hoping against hope that neither man started something. Renee had good instincts on when to flee a scene, but I wasn't familiar with Byron's. He used to be a wrestler. He should be fine… I think. I took a step backwards just to be on the safe side.

"Oh, Set," Sheamus said. "Don't you mean… three matches?" Seth's face paled a bit. "Well, maybe three matches. See, I can't quite decide when I sh'ud cash in my contract for yer title. Sh'ud it be at Night of Champions… Or maybe the night after on Raw… Decisions, decisions, ya know? But,
that's for another night. For t'night, I'd just like ta say… good luck. Champ." Sheamus lightly tapped his briefcase before walking back the way he came. He winked at me as he passed by, though I kept my expression blank.

Seth, on the other hand, had no trouble showing his frustration.

**********

The tag match between Roman, Dean, Jimmy and the New Day was something I was looking forward to. I specifically told Seth to not bother me while I was watching. He huffed a bit, but pulled up a chair to sit next to me. "Not gonna bother you," he said when I glanced at him. "But you never know when you'll need me to cover your eyes or something."

"Whatever."

The match was pretty good. Jimmy had been on commentary for the past six or seven months, and when he got the tag, he was just bouncing with energy. It was fun, though I was nervous he'd run out of energy too quickly. They did really well together, the three of them, and I started to hope that this match was just the beginning of a great team, that he, Roman, and Dean would go to Night of Champions and kick some Wyatt Family butt. I smiled at Jimmy climbed the ropes, intending to do an elbow drop or possibly a frog splash.

Then, the lights went out. When they turned back on a few seconds later, Jimmy was gone. "What the hell-- ROLLINS! Get off me!!" I clawed at his hands over my eyes.

"It's the Wyatts, dollface. Roman wouldn't--"

"Since when do you care what Roman wants or doesn't want?!" I peeled his hands off of my face and turned to face him. "This is getting ridiculous. I get that they're scary, but we've dealt with them before. I've dealt with them before."

"Yeah, but… it's different now."

"WHY?! Why is it different? Because of Braun Strowman?"

"That… and… we're not able to protect you as a unit anymore…" He looked away.

"You do realize I had to deal with Bray when he was going after Dean, right?"

"I… what? You did?"

"Yeah, of course."

"I… don't remember seeing you around…"

"Yeah, well…" I didn't want to go into specifics. "I was definitely more behind the scenes at the time. I had actually taken some time off, but didn't want to explain everything to Seth. "You and Dean had finally hit the pause button on your fighting, and then the thing with Bray started…" I shook my head. "My point is that I have experience with him. Not a lot, but some. Plus… you guys can't protect me forever."

"Like fuck I can't."

I rolled my eyes. "It's true. I mean, just look at our time together since May. There was the incident with Brock on the first day, that thing with Randy, the deal with the Jays and Kane, then the stuff
"Ok, ok, I get it. Doesn't mean I won't stop trying."

"But you need to understand that it will happen. And not even letting me see the matches and see what happens… it's just going to make it worse when I end up facing them, because you know it's going to happen. No matter what you, or Roman, or Dean do to prevent it, it's going to happen at some point."

Seth grumbled, but nodded. I turned back to the monitor just in time to see Jimmy lying on the ramp, with Roman and Dean huddled protectively over him. The Wyatts were nowhere to be seen. I shuddered, but did not look away.

**********

I watched the other wrestlers walk out to the ring first. Ryback followed after them, his music muffled by the thick curtains.

"Rollins, are you sure you're ready for this? You haven't exactly been in a good head space lately."

He smacked his fist into his other palm, a grimace on his face. "Yeah, I got this. No Sting, no statue, no distractions tonight. Only frustration and anger. I will defeat Ryback." He poured the contents of his water bottle over his head and shook his hair a little. "So, uh… I wanted to ask… this match… it's a No DQ. Are you going to, um… Are you going to do anything? If it should come up?"

I sighed. No DQ. No disqualifications. If I wanted to interfere, I was within the rules to do so. Or rather, there were no rules to prevent me from doing so. "Are you asking me to?"

"No. I just… if you did, I didn't want to be taken by surprise." He looked thoughtful.

"I don't think I will. Unlike you, Roman, or Dean, I can control my temper."

Seth smirked. "Is that why you almost punched out John Cena last week?"

I felt my face get warm. "I didn't… I mean… how did you know?? I hadn't even raised my hand an inch! Is that why you pulled me back??"

Seth pushed a stray lock of hair behind my ear. "I know you. I could tell something was up. I watched the video later on, and that was when I realized your intentions, but at the time, I just knew I had to grab you before I lost you to… wherever it was that you went inside your head."

"Oh…" My mood was dropping quickly.

"Hey, I'm the last one to judge you on it. It was… It was not a good situation for you. I know you still get affected whenever the Shield is mentioned. And what I…"

"Please, stop," I whispered. "I don't want to talk about this."

He pulled me into a hug. "We have to some time."

"Yeah, I know… but not right now. I'm fine at the moment and you need to get into the right mindset for your match." Seth's music started. "See? Let's go!" I quickly kissed his cheek.

He tilted his head and I heard the slight popping of his joints. "I'm ready."
The walk to the ring was a tense one. We were surrounded by the other wrestlers, none of them allies to Seth, but a few that were friendly towards me.

"Hola, bonita," Kalisto said when I stood by him, Sin Cara and Dolph. "Good night for a lumberjack match, no?"

"As good a night as any," I replied, smiling at the man. "Hey, Dolph. How's Lana?"

"Doing well, thanks for asking. She can't wait to come back. She told me you're dating now?" he elbowed me playfully. "Lucky guy. Not a wrestler, I assume."

I smiled. "No, definitely not. He's never even been to an event. He-- Oh!" Seth had just shoved his title belts at me.

"Guard these with your life," he growled.

I mock saluted him. "Aye, aye, cap'n!" He didn't smile as he walked back to the center of the ring. That wasn't a good sign.

"He seems to be taking it well," Dolph said as the bell rang to begin the match. He helped me adjust the two belts across my torso in an X again. "That looks pretty cool."

"Right? And Rollin's just concerned about Sting and John and the two matches he has at Night of Champions," I said, leaning on the edge of the ring. Seth started strong, getting Ryback in a headlock, but the tables were soon turned on him. "Come on, Rollins!" I said, clapping for him. No one else did, but I didn't let that bother me.

Seth was launched to the other side of the ropes, though managed to stay on the apron. The wrestlers on that side of the ring taunted him. "Hey, hey, hey!" he shouted at them. "Stay back! Just stay back!" He even went so far as to kick at them, though he didn't actually touch them. It was really funny.

"So tell me about the guy," Dolph said. "Lana didn't seem very impressed with him."

I laughed. "Well, I suppose by her standards," I gestured at Dolph, "that Richard is pretty dull. He reads a lot of theology and not a lot else."

"But you like him?"

"Yeah, he's sweet, and kind. Funny, too. Not sure I can really see a future with him," I winced as Seth got a good kick to Ryback's stomach, "but it's still pretty early." Ryback shook off the kick and delivered a hard punch to Seth's sternum. He went down like a sack of potatoes.

"Ouch," Dolph said, a small smile on his face as he watch Ryback and Seth. "Think he'll be ok?"

"Rollins is tougher than he looks," I replied. Ryback was ready for Seth when he got back to his feet, and tossed him with an arm drag right across the ring. Seth landed with a loud thud, and used the momentum to roll himself out of the ring, right past the Prime Time Players, the Lucha Dragons, Dolph and myself. "There's no count outs, Rollins!" I yelled helpfully. "Can't escape that way!" He flipped me off, which had me laughing.

The Luchas and Dolph found more amusement in grabbing Seth and tossing him back into the ring. A few more traded punches, and Seth tossed Ryback out of the ring, probably hoping that the wrestlers surrounding the ring would either toss him back in or put the beat down on him and then toss him back in. It was an underhanded strategy, but an effective one. Or it would have been, if
Ryback hadn't nipped it in the bud by punching Bo Dallas in the mouth. The others were either intimidated or hadn't intended to fall into Seth's plan to begin with. Ryback got back into the ring on his own, but Seth attacked him immediately.

"So, this guy, Richard," Dolph said, "He as handsome as me?" He waggled his eyebrows suggestively, making me laugh again.

"Few are as handsome as you, weirdo, but I think you knew that already. Richard is… solid. He's good looking, but he's not pretty, or particularly rugged… just… solid. He's pleasant to look at."

"Doesn't sound like much of a catch."

"It depends on how you look at it," I said. "A lot of the women in my town are jealous that he asked me out." I had been surprised how many people glared at me now that it was known we were going out. Richard was apparently the man all the mothers wanted their daughters to date, and the daughters were convinced he had a wild streak hidden deep down that they wanted to tap. It had to be incredibly deep down, because Richard was not much for anything extreme as far as I could tell.

"I can think of a few people here that are jealous that you said yes to him," Dolph said, a mysterious smile on his lips. "Oh look, there goes Seth. Oops, and there goes Ryback."

I looked back at the ring just in time to see Ryback fly out of the ring, courtesy of Seth, and land right in the middle of a group of men who were happy to start kicking the crap out of him. And kick the crap out of him they did. Seth fell into the ring corner closest to me as the rest of the wrestlers ran to either join in or help Ryback fight back.

"Well, that happened," I said.

"Hey, if they can make my work a little easier, so be it," he snapped at me.

"Jeez, what bug crawled up your butt?" I asked, letting my annoyance creep into my voice. "If you're going to be a dick about this, I'm just going to go back to the locker room. At least I can play on my tablet back there."

He huffed, then noticed that the scuffle outside the ring had been brought to a standstill. The wrestlers had drawn obvious sides, and Ryback was right smack dab in the middle of that storm.

"I'd rather you stay…the Wyatts and all that," he muttered. "Just no more idle chit chat with Dolph, ok? It's distracting."

"Surprised you can even hear it."

"Can't, but I can see it."

"Fine, whatever." I walked over to a different spot as Ryback was thrown back into the ring and the other wrestlers retook their places around the apron. I stood in between Jack Swagger and Adam Rose, neither of whom I knew very well, and I knew would not be very interested in talking to me. Big Show was two spots down from me, and I wondered if he would try to help Seth out, as he had the last time Seth had had a match against Ryback. So far, he hadn't really done anything except watch.

Seth got the upper hand once again, and applied a head lock to Ryback. He had a pretty good grip on him as well. Ryback was having trouble getting out of it, despite his obvious strength advantage.
He did get out of it, of course. Headlocks are good for wearing your opponent down, but generally not for making them tap out. Seth didn't let that deter him, and backed Ryback into the corner with a few good blows to the side of his head and to his torso. However, that's when he started to show his frustration, and yelled at the wrestlers surrounding the ring, "You see this? I'm the Man! Me! I! Am! The! MAN!"

I noticed Kevin watching Ryback. He was on the direct opposite side of the ring from me, and the way he was looking Ryback was… odd. I knew Kevin had interrupted Ryback's interview on Monday, but I hadn't heard anything else to explain his sudden fascination with the Big Guy.

Seth misstepped, and it gave Ryback the opportunity he needed. Seth found himself being lifted up and then planted right into the ground. Not enough to put him away, since he kicked out just as the ref counted to two. Ryback got up and started calling for his big finishing move. The crowd, lead by R-Truth, started to chant *Feed me more!* Big Show took that opportunity to grab Ryback by the ankle and drag him out of the ring, throwing him right into the barricade. Mark Henry walked from his spot near the announcers' table and punched Big Show without even pausing. Big Show returned the punch with a Knockout Punch, sending Mark Henry down to the mat and right on top of Ryback. I took a step back, even going as far as to jump in the ring, as the other wrestlers began to rush at Big Show, specifically the Luchas, the Dudleyz, the Prime Time Players and Dolph. It was really hard to not laugh as one of the largest men in the entire company was driven backstage by the significantly shorter men. Ryback was still on the mat, and I took the opportunity to check on Seth.

"You ok?" I asked him, kneeling beside him.

"I need another good luck kiss…" he moaned, holding tight to his ribs.

"I'm not kissing you in front of the WWE Universe."

"Why not? You'd do it for--"

"Roman and Dean have significant others that understand what my good luck kisses mean. I'm friends with Gal and Rini. I am not friends with Zahra. I've met her on exactly two occasions, for a combined total of eight minutes, and don't think I didn't notice she's never home when I visit." I sighed. "I'm not about to let a misunderstanding get in the way, and that's final."

He was gazing at my skirt. He mumbled something, but I didn't catch it.

"What was that?"

"Hadn't thought about it like that…" he said.

That didn't sound anything like what he had muttered, but I just rolled my eyes at him. "Some 'Architect' you are. Oops, gotta go." I rolled out of the ring just as Ryback jumped back in. Seth was up in a flash and tried to charge him, but Ryback caught him, lifted him up and then slammed him down with a Spinebuster. Ryback tried for his Meathook, but Seth managed a Superkick. Ryback went down on one knee, leaning on the ropes for support. Seth charged at him. Ryback caught Seth and flipped him up, back, and over the ropes. He was lucky the other wrestlers were there, otherwise the ground would have broken his fall. Ryback only had a few precious seconds of reprieve, because Stardust, the Ascension, Heath Slater, and a few others leapt into the ring and started punching and kicking him. The rest of the wrestlers, except for Kevin, jumped in to fight off the ones beating up Ryback. Very quickly, it became a free for all. Fortunately, they didn't stay in the ring. The fighting migrated to the ramp as some wrestlers fled and others pursued. Seth jumped back into the ring, intending to take advantage of what had been done to Ryback, but the
Big Guy wasn't finished off just yet. He clotheslined Seth, and lifted him up for a Shell Shock. That was when Kevin Owens struck. He grabbed Ryback's ankle and pulled, causing Ryback to fall and release Seth. Cat that he is, he landed on his feet and immediately went for the Pedigree. Ryback was successfully pinned, making Seth the winner of the match.

"Can we go now?" I asked him as he rolled out of the ring.

"Didn't enjoy the match?" We walked up the ramp, avoiding the wrestlers that were still laid out on the floor. The medics were running out to tend to them.

"Not really. I mean… I expected all of the lumberjacks to try and kick your ass. It was kind of meh."

Seth stared at me. "You're such a brat," he finally said, shaking his head, but he smiled and pulled me into a sweaty hug. "Those titles look good on you like that, by the way."

"I know, right? I want you to keep both of them just so I can hold them for you like this."

"For you, sure." Seth was giving me a weirdly soft look. "Hey, wanna come over this week for the break? We can do a late Labor Day cookout and--"

"Oh… I'd love to, but I promised Richard I'd go home see him." Seth's face fell.

"Right… right, keep forgetting about him," he said, looking away. "He treating you ok?"

"Yeah, so far, he's been the perfect gentleman."

"Good… good. Let me know if that changes." I raised an eyebrow. "Hey, you're my favorite girl. Gotta kick his ass if he treats you bad, right?"

I shook my head as I smiled at him. "Idiot. But I'll let you know."
Stephanie and Hunter started off the show as Seth and I watched from backstage. They talked about the lineup for Night of Champions, and then about some of the matches for that very evening, a lot of big matches since it was the big season premiere of Raw. Only one really caught my interest, and it was mostly because I had a feeling Seth would be interested. I was right.

"So… the Stinger is going to go up against Big Show…" he murmured to himself.

"You're going to do something, aren't you?"

He grinned at me. "You know me so well."

"And you know me. I'm going to stop you," I said, raising an eyebrow at him. "I thought you were past this stuff?"

"Hey, when you earn a statue that looks exactly like you and then watch it get destroyed, see how you feel about it then."

He had a point. "Still…" I said, "It's childish and you're better than that."

"Your face is childish."

I shook my head. "Idiot."

**********

Seth had an extra spring in his step as we walked to the Authority's office. "Guys! Wow! What a way to start off the season premiere of Raw!" he said as we entered through the open door. Both Stephanie and Hunter seemed to be in a good mood, and didn't comment on Seth interrupting their conversation. "And Sting… wow, first match ever on Monday Night Raw… just… wow. History making. But, I was wondering, what are we going to do about Cena? And Sheamus, for that matter."

"Well," Hunter said, a gleam in his eye, "I think you just solved that problem. Two birds. One stone."

"Wait, wait, wait…" Seth said, his grin growing broader. "You don't mean… Cena… versus Sheamus?" I smiled as he did his little happy dance. "Brilliant! You're brilliant, Hunter."

"Yeah, so you can just… relax, take the night off, just enjoy yourself," Stephanie said. "It's important to train and work hard, but it's also important to relax and take a break. So, go on, get out of here, you two."

She gave us such a genuine smile, I almost felt like I really could relax.

Almost.

**********

Seth was talking with Big Show when I saw Paige fuming in the hallway, Becky by her side. I hurried over. "Hey, what happened?"
"You didn' see ta match?" Becky asked. Paige had had another match against Sasha, which I had wanted to watch.

I shook my head. "No, I had to deal with reporters making requests for interviews. The boss has been promising more than Rollins can handle. Plus, I was trying to figure out how to stop Rollins from messing with Sting. Completely missed it."

"Just as well," Paige said. "Not my finest moment. Been having a lot of those lately…" I rubbed her shoulder. "I'll be fine. Once I break that anime brat in half," she growled. Then she shook her head. "But that's later. Why are you trying to stop Seth? He needs every advantage he can get over Sting."

"He can get a win without--"

"Sweetheart, have you seen Sting's matches?" Paige interrupted.

I frowned a bit, feeling uncomfortable with how unprepared the question made me feel. "Not a lot of them. Really just the one he had with Hunter at the past Wrestlemania." I didn't want to admit that I had only watched it with half my attention, since I had been anxious about Roman's match with Brock. "I have copies of his matches to review, but I just haven't had time."

"You should make time," Charlotte said gently. "I'll ask my dad about him. They have a history together. But Paige is right. If Seth can get an advantage over Sting, even by a little, you shouldn't stop him. In fact, maybe you should help him."

"No' all wins are based on talent alone, ya know?" Becky added. I nodded, feeling a slight sinking feeling that I had doomed Seth in my stubbornness.

**********

"Can't believe you want to watch this…" Seth grumbled. It was time for Miz TV and his special guests, the Wyatts.

"What did I tell you last week?" He grumbled again, but I turned back to the monitor. The fireflies filled the arena as the Wyatts made their way to the ring. "So freaking creepy…"

"We could watch paint dry. I'm sure that would be loads more interesting than--"

"Shut up." They were in the ring, Miz was thanking them for coming. His first sign should have been when Luke and Braun threw their chairs out. Miz usually has a better sense of self-preservation, but I suppose he felt invincible when it came to Miz TV and his precious interviews. Miz was kind of stupid like that, especially when he kept questioning Bray. Even when Bray told him to he wasn't safe, Miz has the audacity to still believe they wouldn't hurt him. "Such a fool."

"Who is… Braun Strowman?" Miz asked.

Bray smiled slowly. "He's right there, Miz." He gestured to the man standing behind him. "Why don't you just... ask him?"

Miz really is an idiot. "O-ok... Braun... would you tell us about yourself?" It looked like Miz's arm trembled as he held the microphone up to Braun's black sheep mask.

Bray started to chuckle as Braun turned to Miz and slowly lifted his mask, his soulless eyes looking hungrily at Miz like he was t-bone steak. If anyone was going to commit murder and cannibalism, it was going to be the giant that stood by Bray. Braun didn't say anything as Bray's
laughter turned maniacal.

"Isn't this what you wanted Miz?" he shouted, still smiling. "To get that BIG scoop?! You put yourself in harm's way to get what you want… That's what's wrong with the world today. Nobody thinks about the consequences, they just WANT and WANT and WANT--"

"But what do YOU want, Bray?" Miz said, leaning in close. I was surprised, but I suppose I shouldn't have been. Bray was right. Miz would do anything to get the dirt. He was the worst sort of journalist without actually being a journalist.

Bray had a very simple answer for Miz. "I want you to suffer." That got Miz to back off. "I want Roman Reigns and Dean Ambrose to suffer. I want people to PAY for their sins… but what do I want most? I want people to understand that no matter how many show up for Night of Champions… they will all… fall… DOWN."

Miz was lucky when Roman and Dean came out, and I hoped that he appreciated that fact, but I somehow doubted it as well. It was a blessing when Dean kicked Miz out of the ring. It reiterated the fact that Miz was not their partner.

**But who is…? That's the million dollar question.**

Renee had told me they found someone, but she didn't know who. From what I understood, no one had any idea.

*Mind games. Roman and Dean play them. We used it as a tactic all the time as the Shield. The only reason I didn't like Seth doing it was because... because of everything that happened... I sighed. I hated it, being biased and contradicting myself. But if you don't learn from your mistakes, you'll never be able to help Seth...*

"Hey, let's get--"

"Rollins, for the last time, shut up. Roman is talking." I missed hearing a chunk of what he had said, more due to my own internal monologue than Seth's talking, but I didn't want him to know that. At least, I caught the last part.

"We found a partner, we found our third man. And in six days, we're going to bring the big fight, we're gonna whoop your ass, and you can believe... THAT."

I smiled as I saw Bray's face, as I saw that flicker of doubt. That was all Roman needed. That flicker was his foot in the door, and could potentially lead to the Wyatt's downfall. Whoever they had asked, I hoped it was someone who could deliver.

**********

"Ok, so Sheamus and John thoroughly tired each other out in their match. I doubt either one of them will be bothering you tonight," I said, scrolling through my notes on my tablet. "Charlotte has her match with Nikki going on right now, and after that, Rusev and Cesaro have their match, and the main event will be Sting versus Big Show. If you want to leave early, you can."

"Nah, I want to see the final match of the night."

He said it so flippantly, I cast my eyes up to look at him. He was playing with his water bottle, innocently. *Now, ask him now. "What are you... what are you planning?"* I said quietly.

He smiled. Innocently. "Why do you think I'm planning something?" Too innocently.
"Uh, because I know you. You're going to mess with that match, aren't you?" I crossed my arms over my chest. "I would just like to point out--"

"Hey hey hey," he said, holding his hands up. "I know how you feel about me doing stuff like that. I wouldn't dare try something." More innocent smiling. Who did he think he was fooling?

"I'll thank you to not lie straight to my face. Look..." I sighed heavily. "I've been thinking about it. And... Team PCB may have helped me come to this conclusion, but... I can't stop you from doing that crap. I know that. I also know that... sometimes, this stuff is necessary. I hate that it is, but... guys like Sting... they're on a different level. And for you to get to that level, or even to bring them to yours, well, I won't stand in your way."

He looked at me in surprise. "Really?"

"Yeah... really. I'm probably going to leave, just to make sure I don't get in the way." I looked down at my tablet, picking at the corner of the cover. "Sorry..."

"Hey... no, don't apologize."

I laughed. "Seriously? You spent a lot of time guilting me for not going along with your plans, hiding your plans in some cases..." He had the decency to look embarrassed.

"Yeah, well... I'm not going to apologize for getting things done, but... you and me, we're at a different point in our relat-- friendship. Our friendship. And, if you're willing to listen to my plans, or maybe even help..." He looked at me hopefully.

"I'll listen. I'll give feedback," I said, rolling my eyes, but smiling. I suddenly didn't want to tell him it had been my intention to offer help. "Not gonna necessarily be a part of those plans though. I have lines that will not be crossed."

"You do have good lines." Seth grinned. "But I'll tell you my plan. You don't have to do anything you don't want to do, I promise."

I shook my head. "Lay it on me then."

**********

We ran into Big Show a little bit before his match. He and Seth chatted while I thought over our conversation from earlier. Seth's plan was... kind of dumb. I had told him as much. "I just want to mess with his head, like he's been messing with mine. I don't need it to work perfectly, just work enough, you know?" he had said. I had offered some suggestions, but Seth ultimately didn't take any of them. He did listen to my contingency suggestions, which made me happy. It felt weird to be actively helping him like that, but also, familiar. I smiled a little as I remembered the similar plans that we had concocted for the Shield. Different times, but--

"You ok there, shortstack?" Big Show asked me.

"What?"

"You're a million miles away. Not liking Seth's plan?"

"Oh, no, sorry, it's not that... just thinking. Don't mind me. Good luck tonight."

Big Show winked at me. "Thanks, but I don't need luck when I've got my Knockout Punch." He held his fist up. "Sting won't know what hit him."
"I don't know… I didn't know Stephanie and Hunter would be at the announcer's table," I said. Big Show's match with Sting had already started. We were watching on a monitor backstage. "It wouldn't do to get on their bad side. You're already walking a thin line with what happened last week."

"It'll be fine. Hunter won't mind me messing with Sting a bit. Just stay back here." He turned to leave, but then turned right back to me. "Give me extra good luck."

I raised an eyebrow at him. "If you're worried enough to think you need--"

"Just give me my damn kiss already. Time is running out."

I sighed, but stood on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek. "Be careful," I said quietly, taking his titles from him.

"I always am!" he said, grinning, then he was gone, running towards the ring. I watched from just out of sight of the crowd. He jumped into the ring and went right after Sting. Big Show smiled and joined in on the assault as the referee called for the bell. Sting won, but it was by disqualification.

I had warned Seth that Sting might receive help once he started down this path, and sure enough, an orange blur ran down the ramp. John Cena went right after Seth, throwing him out of the ring. Seth recovered quickly, but not quick enough. He was trying to flank Sting and John, but Big Show was thrown out before he could get back in the ring. It was comical to see Seth jump into the ring, only to panic and jump right back out again.

Hunter look displeased, but Stephanie was whispering to him. He was soon smiling. And in three…

"Ladies and gentlemen…" Hunter said into the microphone. "That's enough controversy for one night. I'm going to tell you how this will go down." Just as we predicted, Hunter announced that Sting and John would be teaming up against Seth and Big Show. I walked down to the ring with Seth's titles to stand in his and Big Show's corner as the match was started again.

I had told Seth to not try to win, to just test Sting, get a feel for his style, how he moved in the ring. Seth had scoffed at that. "If I'm going out there, I'm going out there to win."

"You're going to lose if you keep up this attitude." That only earned me a laugh.

While Seth was busy in the ring, I was busy on the apron, making mental notes as well as filming from a small handheld video camera I had borrowed from the AV guys. I only wish I had thought of this sooner. Coaches use stuff like this for their players all the time. If I wanted to help Seth be better, then I should do the same.

Seth lost for him and Big Show. Tapped out to Sting's Scorpion Deathlock. It was an interesting match, but both Big Show and Seth made too many cocky moves for it to end any other way. I would have to review the footage later, but I already had a slew of mental notes to go over with Seth before his matches on Sunday. He can do this. He can beat Sting AND John. If he only gets his head out of his ass.

**********

"Sonova… ow!"
I looked up at Seth. "What's the matter?" We were getting ready to leave the arena and I had just placed my bag outside his locker room door.

He scowled at his belt buckle. "Damn thing is stuck! One of the hooks is bent, I think. Maybe from when Sting did that stupid lock of his. Or when Cena sent me over the ropes and I landed hard on the floor." He growled in frustration.

"I did get a really good shot of you tapping out," I said with a giggle. Seth just glared at me, then went back to his task.

"Just come off already!"

I sighed. "Come here. Let me take a look at it."

"No, I got it. Just kinda tired, so it's taking me longer…" He fumbled with it for a for more seconds before swearing again.

Shaking my head, I got up and went over to him. "Idiot." I moved his hands away and took a look at the buckle. The belt it was attached to was really wedged in between the metal. "Hold on, let me see if I can get a better angle." I knelt in front of Seth and pushed the buckle up as far as I could to see from underneath. "Ok, I see the problem. We either need to just cut the leather, which honestly would be easier, or find some pliers and--"

"What the hell is going on here?!

I turned to see Roman. "Hey, Ro. Can you give me a hand? His buckle is stuck and I think I can get it off, but I need-- Hey!"

Roman was lifting me up and over his shoulder.

"Roman Reigns! Let me down!" He ignored me. Even when I elbowed him in the head. I hated that they could basically treat me like a doll if they needed to. "Damn it! I said let me down!"

"Quiet!!" he snarled at me. His tone was more serious than normal, so I settled down. "And you," he growled at Seth. "I catch you doing that again, and I will end you." He turned and carried me out of the room. Seth was frozen in shock and… embarrassment? That couldn't be right.

Once we were far away from Seth, Roman put me down and looked me over. "He didn't do anything, did he? He didn't touch you?"

"Ro, what is going on? What happened to staying away from each other because of the Wyatts?"

Roman snorted. "They're gone already. Saw them leave myself. I just happened to be walking by when I saw Rollins taking advantage of you when he's supposed to be keeping you safe."

I stifled a laugh. "What?? Taking advantage? I was just helping him with his belt buckle."

Roman rolled his eyes and scoffed. "Right. Helping. Baby girl, I know you feel like you can trust him again, but you can't. He's a snake. He put you in a compromising situation--"

"What?!

I said, starting to panic. "No, he didn't! His buckle was just stuck!"

Roman raised an eyebrow at me. "You seriously believe that?"

My panic melted to confusion. "Uh, yeah? Because I saw it. I saw where it was stuck."
"And you had to get on your knees in front of him for that?" The damn eyebrow was still raised.

The way he stressed on your knees made me pause. "Yes? I mean, yes. I did. I needed a better angle to see the mechanism."

"With your hands on his crotch?"

"It wasn't-- my hands were on his belt buckle, which is just above his crotch, thankyouverymuch!"

My cheeks burned a little from that.

"And his hand just had to be on your head, like he was holding you in place?"

"What? His hand wasn't on my--" Then I realized what Roman had walked in on, or what he thought he had walked in on. My whole head felt like it was on fire. My chest, too, for that matter, because my blush reached that far down. "Oh my god, ROMAN! It was not like that! I would never-- He has a girlfriend! And I have a-- I have Richard…" I sighed and covered my still burning face with my hands. "Oh my god… I cannot believe you thought that…" At least that explained why Seth had been so embarrassed. I hadn't even realized what it looked like!

"Right. A girlfriend. That hasn't stopped him before."

I growled and looked up at Roman. "Then if you don't trust him, trust me. I would not do something like that and you know it. Besides that, you only saw that because the door was wide open! If I was going to do something like that, I would have the sense to shut the goddamn door!"

Roman conceded that point. "Fine, but if it happens again, I'm ripping his nutsack off."

I turned my face to the sky, exasperated. "Oh, for the love of…"

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - September 17, 2015

"Hey," I called out, running after Paige, Charlotte and Becky. The trio slowed down and turned, smiling as they saw me. "I just wanted to wish you a good match tonight."

"Thanks, sweetheart," Paige said, kissing my cheek. "We'll kick some B.A.D. ass!!"

Becky giggled at the pun, while Charlotte rolled her eyes. She was still smiling though. "You going to watch?" she asked me.

I shook my head. "Not sure yet. Rollins is teaming with Sheamus later tonight. Not his choice, but he isn't as bothered by it as I am."

"I'm sure it'll work out," Becky said in her lyrical Irish accent. "Dun worry yer head too much."

I smiled. "I'll try, but no promises."

**********

Seth started off the show, talking about his upcoming match at the end of the night, as well as how unworried he was about Sheamus being his partner. "You know what they say, keep your friends close…" He looped an arm around my shoulders and pulled me in. "And your enemies closer."

"You're an idiot."
"You're not my enemy, doll--"

Sheamus's music interrupted him. "Well, this can't be good," I muttered.

A microphone was handed to him as he approached the ring. "Dat's an interesting concept dere, Set. But it begs da question. Now… do ya consider me a friend… or an enemy?" He smiled and held up the gold colored Money in the Bank briefcase. "Because trust me when I say dis, you don't want me as an enemy."

Seth pushed me back and away from Sheamus before replying. "I--"

"Keep me as far or as close as you want, Set," Sheamus interrupted. "It don't matta. Because when I cash this beauty in, I will take yer championship, and dere's no-ting you can do 'bout it. You won't see it comin', friend."

Seth had a dangerous look in his eye, but then a smile broke out on his face. "Well, no offense, but I'm pretty sure I'm going to see," he pointed at all of Sheamus, but especially his face and mohawk, "all of this coming from a mile away. I don't agree with the WWE Universe often, but…" The You look stupid! chants were starting up. "Yeah… you do look kinda stupid, Sheamus."

I smacked my hand to my face. "Damn it, Rollins…" I looked up to see Seth shrugging his shoulders and Sheamus turning quite red in the face. I sighed heavily. "This really isn't good."

"I do not look stupid!" Sheamus screamed. Seth was just grinning and pointing at Sheamus as he stalked around the ring, scowling at the crowd, who were in full chant mode by that point. "Arr tee aaych! Arr. Tee. AAYCH!!"

"Hey, hey, what are you saying?" Seth asked. "Artie Hay-ch? Who's that?"

"NO! Arr. Tee. Aaych! Respect The Hawk!"

"Oh, for fuck's sake…" Seth muttered, thankfully not into the microphone.

Oooooohhh… he's saying the letters, R. T. H. That makes more sense.

"Don'cha know any-ting, Set?" Sheamus growled. "Keep trowing those insults at me and we won't make da main event t'night."

Watching Seth, I saw his shoulders tense, and I took a step back. Best to not be anywhere near these two if it came to blows. Sheamus must have sensed it as well, though I doubt he was genuine with his next words.

"Set… I don't want ta be at odds wit ya! I… I want ta be yer frien'! I really do! An' you know how much I love ta fight." Ok, that part I believed. Sheamus did love to fight, almost as much as Roman. "T'night, we're taking on Roman Reigns an' Dean Ambrose."

My head snapped up at that. I had been under the impression that they were going to fight against Cesaro and Dolph Ziggler. Did it change? Or was I just misinformed?

"You an' me, we'll made mince pie outta dem. But… dere's anot'er reason I'm lookin' forward to t'night." I watched Sheamus and Seth very carefully. Seth was still tense, but not as much. He didn't seem to trust Sheamus either. Good, I thought. "See… I can stan', right ov'r dere, in dat corner, an' have a perfect seat to watch yer strengths… an' yer weaknesses."

Seth's hand balled up into a fist. I was quick to grab his arm and make sure he didn't take a swing
at Sheamus. "Save it for later," I whispered to him. He gave me a curt nod, never taking his eyes off the Celtic Warrior.

"When I'm ready… it won't matta if ya see me comin' or not. Because I will be walking away as WWE… World… Heavyweight… Champion." He smiled brilliantly at us. "So! I'll see ya in da main event. Friend."

Seth and I stood in the middle of the ring as Sheamus walked out and back up the ramp, humming merrily to himself.

**********
I was able to catch the tail end of Paige and Becky's match against Team B.A.D.'s Naomi and Sasha. It did not end well. Paige was going for the PTO on Naomi when Sasha jumped up on the ring as a distraction. Becky took her out, but it was too late. Naomi got the upper hand and rolled Paige up for the pin.

Paige was understandably upset. I sent her a text to let her know I was up for hanging out later if she wanted to.

**********
We went out first, at Sheamus's insistence. I kept a wary eye out for a sudden attack from behind. I didn't trust Sheamus one bit, and it was obvious that Seth didn't either. We stopped at the end of the walkway, right before it opened up to the ring area, and waited as Seth's music changed to Sheamus's.

"Worried about him?" I asked Seth as we watched the Irishman walk down the ramp to join Seth for the match.

"Of course no--"

"Don't lie to me."

Seth huffed. Sheamus smirked at both of us as he walked past and into the ring. "Fine. I don't like what he was saying earlier. I thought I could handle him being my partner, but it was a mistake for this match to be set up."

"Yeah, I figured. Let me ease your mind a bit. I'll keep my eye on him for you, ok? He even looks at the briefcase funny, and I'll be there. You just keep your head in the match."

"Really?"

"Yeah. I mean… I've already stopped him once from cashing in on you. I might as well do it again, you know?" I looked away, feeling a bit embarrassed as I remembered when that happened.

Seth chuckled and threw his arm around my shoulders. "Thanks, dollface. You're the best."

"Don't call me dollface." I nudged him to remove his arm. Roman and Dean were staring. "Get off me. People are going to get the wrong idea."

"Like I care."

"You'll care when you get an angry call from your girlfriend." He sighed, but removed his arm. I was mostly certain the camera guys hadn't caught that. They were focusing on Sheamus as he stood
on the ring post and posed with his briefcase. A few of the fans were watching us, but most had their attention on the men inside the ring. "Thank you. You ready?"

"Yeah. Here," he said, looping the titles over my shoulders and head in the X formation again. "You look awesome. Let's kick some ass!"

I shook my head and went to stand in his and Sheamus's corner. As much as I wanted to wave at Dean and Roman, or even just smile, I knew the Wyatts might be watching. No, not might. They were definitely watching. The hairs on the back of my neck were standing up. I regarded my brothers as coldly as I could. They did the same.

"Hey, why is that there?" Seth demanded of Sheamus, pointing at the briefcase that was under the bottom turnbuckle. "That does not need to be here."

"D'nt you worry about that, Set," Sheamus said, smiling broadly. "Yer former bruthers are watchin', ya know." Roman and Dean were snickering and pointing over at our corner. I took the briefcase out of the ring. Sheamus scowled at me, but didn't say anything as I handed it to the time keeper. Seth gave me a small, but grateful smile.

He started off the match, and was subjected, but Sheamus tagged in rather quickly. That pissed Seth off. "You think you can do better, huh?" he shouted at Sheamus strutted around the ring, playing with his mohawk. "You look stupid!"

"Rollins, don't antagonize your partner. I can only keep an eye on him to a certain extent, you know."

Sheamus looked confused on where the insult had come from, and it helped that the crowd was starting to chant it as well. You look stupid. Clap, clap, clap clap clap. You look stupid. Clap, clap, clap, clap clap, You look stupid. Clap, clap, clap clap, cloak cloak cloak cloak cloak. Dean and Roman were both enjoying it. Sheamus jumped out of the ring suddenly, and grabbed a microphone.

"Hey! Hey! Hey!" he screamed. Seth, Roman, Dean, and I were all laughing at him. He was just so mad! "How many times do I hafta say this?! I. DO. NOT. LOOK. STUPID!!!! RESPECT THE HAWK!!"

I almost feel bad for laughing. Almost. Sheamus jumped back into the ring, and was immediately rolled up by Dean. He kicked out, but Dean whipped him into the corner, jabbed in him the stomach with both fists. Roman tagged in. Dean ran across the ring, hit the ropes for momentum, then ran back across to hit Sheamus with a dropkick. Roman was already in the ring, following closely behind Dean, and hit Sheamus with a flying clothesline as Dean rolled out. Sheamus fell to the mat. I really wanted to applaud that combination they had done. It was beautiful, masterful, and I couldn't even show my appreciation for it.

Sheamus rolled out of the ring. Dean was back on the apron, ready to tag in, when Seth got into the ring and ran at Roman. Roman caught him before he could land a blow and tossed Seth up and over the ropes. He almost hit Sheamus, but missed and fell to the floor. Dean tagged back in, ran to the ropes, bounced off of them and headed straight to Seth. Seth flinched, put his arms up to protect himself, but Dean's attack never came. Dean had stopped himself as soon as Seth had covered his head. Roman was stalking Seth from behind, and as soon as Seth turned around, hit him with a powerful clothesline. I shook my head.

"Come on, Rollins!" I yelled, clapping my hands. "Stop being an idiot!"

Sheamus tried to attack Roman, but Roman just ducked underneath Sheamus's arm. Dean launched
himself right as Sheamus turned around to land on him and send him to the mat next to Seth. Roman and Dean were back in the ring before either Seth or Sheamus could get up.

"Are you guys done fooling around yet?" I muttered more to myself than them. Dean was doing his gloating dance while Roman strutted a bit, which made me smile. "Damn… I miss them…"

The ref started counting to ten. Seth was on his feet, yelling at Sheamus, who got up and in Seth's face. "Get in there!"

"An' who arr ya ta tell me wat ta do?!" Sheamus yelled back.

"I'm the champ! You listen to me!" Seth growled. The ref was up to three.

"Fook off! Yer not da boss'a me!" Sheamus crossed his arms over his chest. The ref got to six.

"Hey," I said to them, still leaning on the apron. "If you want a countout loss, that's fine, but if you don't, I suggest you get in there, seeing as you are the legal man in this match right now, Sheamus."

He scowled at me, jumped back into the ring, then tagged out as soon as Seth hopped back onto the apron, smiling smugly as he exited the ring.

"Children," I growled. "I'm working with actual children."

Dean grinned like a cheshire cat and immediately lunged at Seth. Seth ducked, pulling down the top rope as he did, and sent Dean over and crashing to the outside of the ring. Seth immediately followed him, picked him up, and tossed him into the barricade with a loud thwack! I winced at the sound. Dean looked more than a little dazed. *Come on, Dean. You've been hit harder than that before and come back from it.*

Seth grabbed Dean again and threw him back into the ring, following him closely and locking Dean into a rear choke hold. Dean was fighting it, of course, but Seth had a good grip on Dean, making it difficult to break free. When he finally did, he immediately lunged at Seth again, but Seth used Dean's momentum to send him into the turnbuckle, face first. Before Dean could recover, Seth picked him up and slammed him into a backbreaker, then rolled him up for a pin. Dean kicked out, somehow, much to Seth's aggravation.

Sheamus actually offered out his hand for the tag. A very annoyed Seth actually took it.

"You guys would make a better team if you didn't have the briefcase hanging in between you," I said.

"You think so?"

I shrugged. "Maybe. Not enough data, but… I could see it happening."

"Hmph… whatever."

Thank goodness Dean can take a lot of punishment, because Sheamus was definitely dealing it out. All while yelling at Roman, Dean… and Seth.

"Ya see that?! Betta keep yer eye on that!" he said, pointing at Seth. He wasn't paying attention, and Dean caught him when he went to pin him, rolling him up into Small Package. Sheamus, unfortunately, kicked out.

"Better keep your eye on your opponent," Seth said with a sneer as Sheamus tagged him back in.
He was on Dean before Dean could recover enough to tag Roman in, stomping on Dean's back repeatedly. I had to look away. Ugly memories… will they never not haunt me?

Seth tagged Sheamus in after a minute of brutalizing Dean, who gave me a not so reassuring wink when Sheamus had him in a headlock. Dean did manage to make a comeback. When Sheamus lifted him up for a slam, Dean grabbed ahold of Sheamus's head and started punching away. Sheamus stumbled closer to the ropes. Dean flipped backwards, pulling both himself and Sheamus over the top of the ropes, though Dean was able to grab the top rope and hold on, while Sheamus landed hard on the floor below. Shaking with determination, Dean got back into the ring and crawled to Roman, but Sheamus recovered more quickly than expected and jumped into the ring to try and stop Dean. He got a Swinging Neckbreaker for his troubles, and Dean was finally able to tag in Roman, just as Sheamus tagged in Seth. Roman was like a cannon. Quick and powerful. Also, much more rested than Seth had been, since Dean had been in the ring for at least ten minutes by that point. I watched with fascination as he just ran over Seth, over and over again.

Seth, of course, knows Roman better than almost anyone else, having been Shield brothers and tag partners for so long. Roman ran out of that initial steam and slowed down to his usual pace. That was the moment Seth was waiting for. Like a venus flytrap, a thought that made me smile. Seth had to suffer through one of Roman's Sitout Powerbombs, which… ouch, but as soon as Roman called for the Superman Punch, he rolled out of the ring, resting on the apron. I retreated to the timekeeper's booth, just to be on the safe side. Sheamus had gathered his wits again and was making his way back onto the apron, though it was slower than it should have been. Is he doing that on purpose?

Roman followed Seth, grabbing Seth by the hair and attempting to pull him back in. Seth grabbed Roman and jumped down, pulling Roman's throat right onto the rope. I winced and rubbed at my own throat. While Roman recovered. Seth jumped back into the ring, attacked the back of Roman's knee to knock him down, and superkicked him right in the jaw. Unfortunately, he had taken too much of a beating from Roman, and didn't have the energy to pin him effectively. In fact, Seth toppled over Roman, landing on the other side. Sheamus was yelling encouragement, begging for the tag. Seth managed to get up and get himself to the corner, just in time for Sheamus to dodge the tag and jump down to the floor.

"Who looks stupid now?!" Sheamus shouted gleefully at Seth. "Well?!"

That did it. If he wants to act like a child… I was still next to the timekeeper's area, so I turned around and grabbed Sheamus's briefcase. Seth was leaning on the ropes, yelling at Sheamus and saw me hold up the case, right before I threw to him. He caught it deftly, much to Sheamus's horror.

"What's-a matter?" Seth taunted him. "Did you misplace something?"

"Give that back! Give that back right now!" Sheamus screamed.

"Come and get it then!" Seth screamed back.

Roman and Dean were looking at the three of us in confusion. Don't interfere just yet! I screamed mentally. Dean gave me the slightest of nods and put his hand on Roman's shoulder, whispering to him. Thank you, Dean!

Sheamus's shoulders were tense, and I was sincerely glad he hadn't turned around to see how Seth had gotten the briefcase in the first place. Then he was jumping up onto the apron and grabbing the golden case. Seth let go, tagged Sheamus in, and immediately rolled out of the ring. Sheamus jumped down and chased after Seth, who was laughing and pointing at the ring. "Go on, get in
there before you get us a countout loss." Sheamus seemed to be too upset to notice, but Seth was
glancing towards the ring so he could see Roman and Dean. I made my way around the other side
of the ring, making sure Seth saw me retreating.

Roman tagged in Dean at Dean's insistence. Seth had stopped moving, and was keeping Sheamus
distracted with yelling. Dean went to the middle of the ring, ran towards the far ropes, then
launched himself in a Suicide Dive right at Sheamus. It was perfect. We couldn't have set it up
better if we had all planned it. Dean grabbed Sheamus and threw him into the ring, to a waiting
Roman who Superman Punched Sheamus and quickly retreated to the corner to watch Dean's back
in case Seth tried to rescue his partner. He watched us walk backwards up the ramp. We were
watching as Dean did Dirty Deeds on a prone Sheamus and pinned him for the win.

"Ah, that was oddly satisfying," I said to Seth, holding up my hand. He snickered, and rewarded me
with a high five, followed by a double fist bump.

The lights went out, and the familiar eerie music of the Wyatt Family echoed throughout the arena.
I could barely see anything, but I felt strong arms pick me up. I started to struggle as I was thrown
over a shoulder, but Seth said, "It's just me, don't worry. Getting you out of here before something
happens." I wish I could have stayed, but I knew he was doing what was best.

**********

"So, I made a list of things you need to watch out for when it comes to Sting. Charlotte talked to
her dad and he sent me some of his thoughts on Sting's in-ring ability. It's really interesting,
actually. I also have a list for Cena, but you've faced him before. I think it would be a better use of
our time to--"

"Dollface, have I ever told you that you're the best?" Seth took the list from me and looked it over.
It was Friday night, and we were in my apartment. "Damn, this is an intensive list." He grinned at
me. "That's my girl."

"Don't call me dollface." I sighed and brought out my tablet. "I also have video to go with the list.
Between the footage I shot on Monday and the footage available from the Network and the dvds I
borrowed, we're going to be here a while." We were sitting in my apartment. Chinese food was on
its way, and we were going to do some last minute strategizing for Night of Champions. "For the
future, I'd like to record more of your matches from my point of view, if you're ok with that. I was
thinking about it, and it would really help make you a better wrestler if we reviewed them, what
went wrong, what went right, that sort of thing. If you have time. I can also just review them
myself and then give you bullet points on it. I've been kicking myself for not thinking of it sooner."

"Don't. You bruise too easy for that. So… when and where would we do these reviews?" He took a
sip of his energy drink.

"Preferably while it's still fresh in your mind. So probably at the hotel, either the night of or the
morning after, before we have to get going. If it's before a pay-per-view, then the entire week
before? I'll have to think about it. Hey, let me try that." I took a sip of his drink and made a face.
"Ugh… So bitter…"

"It's the caffeine content. Bitter taste, but I'm raring to go." He took the drink from me and gulped
the last of it, while I tried to not think about other ways he'd be 'raring to go.'

*Idiot, he doesn't mean it like that. Get your mind out of the gutter.* I felt even guiltier when a text
from Richard came in, asking me if I was available. I had told him I couldn't go out tonight
because of work stuff, which was true, but I felt like I was hiding Seth from him and vice versa. I
texted him back, letting him know I was still busy, that I had a coworker over, but that I would see him tomorrow for a brunch date. Seth was going to go check out the local Crossfit boxes, which I had no interest in joining him for, and agreed to let him stay with me until we had to leave for the pay-per-view. He currently had a load of laundry in the washing machine, since he wasn't going to make it home to do that. I briefly wondered if I should invite Seth to brunch as well. He already knew I was going with Richard. No, keep your personal life and work life separate. At least until you're more sure about Richard.

The doorbell rang. "Probably the Chinese. I'll get it," Seth said. "You get the video stuff going."

I had the first match ready to go by the time Seth brought the food in.

"You buy from that place often?" he asked.

"Yeah, all the time. It's the best place in town. Why?"

"The delivery guy was really weird. Kept staring at me like I had an extra head or something." He set out the various boxes. "Anyway, let's dive right in. Gonna be a long night."
"What are you smiling about?"

I turned to see Dolph. "Oh, just had a really good, productive weekend. I'd even call it fun. You ready for your match tonight?"

"Yeah. Especially after my own good, productive weekend."

The smile on his face got me asking, "How's Lana?"

"Oh, she's good. She's very… very… good."

"Ha, I bet. Well, good luck tonight." I waved at him as I walked away.

**********

I found Paige alone in the hallway outside the locker room. Charlotte's match was fourth on the card, and Paige and Becky would be accompanying her to the ring. "You ok?"

"Yeah… yeah! I'm fine. Just… taking a breather. Ya know?" She gave me a tight smile.

I sat next to her on the row of steel chairs. "Yeah, I know." I took her hand in mine and gave it a little squeeze. "It's ok, you know. To be upset. You'll get another chance at the championship. You're too good not to."

Paige scoffed, but her smile was more genuine this time. "Thanks." She hugged me. "Hey, room with me tonight. We'll get some comfort food, watch movies… sound good?"

"Yeah, that sounds great."

**********

"You gonna watch their match?" Seth asked me. We were in his locker room, and I was eating some of the gourmet snacks that had been left for him, my eyes glued to the monitor. Charlotte had won the Divas Championship, and I was relieved to see Paige smiling and cheering her on. Seth had finished changing into the gear he had used at SummerSlam. White Power Ranger, I thought with a giggle.

"Yeah, of course I am. I really need to see who their teammate is, for one, and I need to see this ended. I want my brothers back." I took a swig of my water. "I miss them so much. Roman isn't allowing calls or texts, so it's been a total shutdown. I'm lucky if I can run into them when we're in the arenas and the Wyatts aren't."

A chair scraped across the floor, and then Seth was hugging me from behind, his arms encircling my shoulders as he nuzzled the side of my head. "You still have me."

I wanted to give him a sarcastic reply, but he had been great about the whole situation. I couldn't ask for a better friend. "Yeah…" I said softly, holding on to his arms. "I do."

We stayed like that while the Wyatts made their entrance. Dean was the first of his team, followed by Roman. I held my breath as I waited for the third teammate to come out. Who would it be?
Probably not Randy. Definitely not Jimmy. Who could possibly be crazy enough, and brave enough, to join them?

An electronic sound flared and a countdown appeared on the screen. "Holy…" Seth whispered. "Is that…?"

Pyrotechnics went off. Break the walls DOOOOWWWWNNNNNNN!!!

"They got Chris Jericho…" I said, still in shock. "They got Chris Jericho?!?!"

"Damn… that's amazing. Wonder who's dick they had to suck to-- OW! Don't bite me!"

Since his arm had been right in front of me, I had bitten it to shut him up. "Don't be a jackhole then."

Seth grumbled, but kept his arms around me. "Kinky brat."

"Shut up. I didn't even bite you that hard." I leaned back into Seth. "Bray looks pissed about this."

"He's probably still sore about their feud last year. He lost, after all."

"True…" Dean was starting off the match. He tagged in Chris after a few minutes. "When do we have to get to gorilla for your match? I really want to see all of this, and it would probably be best if we avoided them coming back in after."

"We can stay here until the end, but then we'll have to get right over there. They're gonna play some promotional videos before my first match, so I'll be able to use that time to warm up." My chair scraped the floor this time as he pulled me closer. He was so nice and warm, I was having a hard time focusing on the match. "Good thing my locker room is relatively close to it, or else we wouldn't be able to do it."

I winced as Dean and Roman tried to take down Braun with a double tackle and ended up getting knocked down instead. "He's not human… He can't be." Chris went to the top rope and tried for a Crossbody move, but Braun caught him, and threw him at Roman and Dean, who had rolled to the outside of the ring. "I really wish I could have given them some good luck before the match."

"Hmph… I'm sure they'll be fine. In the meantime, I'm still worried about my two matches."

"You'll be fine. Just stick to the plan we came up with. I'll be ringside, yelling at you to stop being a jackhole and get your ass in gear."

"Brat."

"Jerk."

A moment of silence and then Seth was hugging me tighter. "Never leave me."

"Like you'd let me," I said, rolling my eyes, but patting his arm. "Not gonna leave you, weirdo. Not unless you give me a really good reason."

We watched Braun pick up Dean and toss him effortlessly back into the ring, brutalizing him at Bray's command. I flinched each time Dean did.

"Like before?" Seth whispered.

"Sorry?"
His grip on me tightened. "The reason you left me before… because of… what I did to the Shield."

I suddenly couldn't breathe. Roman had tagged in. So had Luke Harper. Roman was running over Luke, at least until Braun got a hold of him when the ref wasn't looking. "N-not now, Seth… Please… not now…" Bray tagged in and went to work on Roman's head with his boot. "Not now…"

"Then when?"

Braun tagged in, and picked up Roman like a ragdoll, throwing him around. "Later… just not now."

He turned me around just as Bray tagged back in. "No. You've been avoiding the topic for six months now. We're friends again, right?" I looked away, but nodded. "Well, we need to talk about it. I hurt you, and… and for some reason, you've gotten past that. You've… you've forgiven me, I think…"

"I…” I still hadn't sorted my feelings on the subject, if I was being honest with myself. "I can't… I can't explain it."

"But you have forgiven me, haven't you?"

"Yes," I said quietly. "But I still can't… I can't talk about it…"

Seth didn't say anything. I could hear the cheers of the crowd coming through the speakers of the monitor. They were cheering for Dean, then for Roman, and then Chris. Seth still didn't say anything as I turned around to see Chris holding Bray in the Walls of Jericho submission hold. Luke broke it up, but Chris was able to tag Dean in. He tried for a Dirty Deeds, but Bray reversed it. They ended up taking each other out with a double Clothesline. I could feel my heart pounding harder inside my chest. Please… please! End this! Dean tagged Roman in, as Bray tagged in Braun. Roman was able to do some decent damage, with a few assists from Dean, and managed to lay the giant man out flat, but at the last second, Chris tagged himself in. I felt as surprised as Roman looked.

"What?! Nononononono!" I screamed, pushing away from Seth and grabbing at the monitor.

"Dollface, what--"

Chris did a Lionsault off the ropes, right onto Braun. He went for the pin, but Braun not only kicked out, he sent Chris flying off of him. "Oh god, no… no no no, you stupid man!"

"Seriously, what are you going on abou--"

Chris charged at Braun, who threw him into the corner. Braun did his own charge, but Chris dodged. It was only a matter of time. Chris went for his Codebreaker move.

"There it is…” I said, deflating in my seat. "That's it."

Braun manhandled Chris, slamming him right into the mat, then picked him up and squeezed him into unconsciousness.

"Shit…” Seth said softly. The ref called for the bell. The Wyatts had won.
"Yeah… pretty much…" I replied. "Come on, let's get you out there."

**********

Seth was warming up in the hallway while the commercial for Brock Lesnar's Go To Hell Tour played. I was holding onto his two titles, lost in my own thoughts, and didn't hear Stephanie and Hunter approach until they were speaking to Seth.

"We just wanted to wish you luck tonight," Stephanie said.

"If anyone can take on Sting and Cena in one night, it's you," Hunter added. "So go get 'em, Champ."

"Yeah… Yeah! That's right! I'm leaving here with both my titles intact. Why? Because I'm the Man. Woo! Let's do this, dollface!"

I gave him a small smile and followed him as we walked the rest of the way to gorilla. I glanced over my shoulder at the last second before we turned the corner. Sheamus was there, talking to Hunter and Stephanie. The two bosses looked worried, while Sheamus looked very confident. Not tonight, Sheamus. Not if I have anything to say about it.

**********

The video package of Seth's path to Night of Champions brought back many memories. One in particular. Heist of the century… been a while since I heard that. Seth looped his arm around my shoulders and kissed the top of my head. "You ok there?"

"Yeah. I'm over that. Been a wild ride since then."

"Any regrets?"

"Yeah. I wish I had kicked your butt sooner."

"Brat."

John's music played first. I could hear the crowd singing, ever so faintly. "Are they… Am I hearing them right?"

Seth strained to listen. "I think they're singing… 'John Cena sucks'? To the tune of his music? Ha! He does suck."

I giggled. "He's reached the Kurt Angle pinnacle!"

Seth's music started. I gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. Since his match with John was first, he was wearing the US Title around his waist, with the Heavyweight Title on his shoulder.

It felt like a long walk to the ring. "Remember, just focus on this match. Stay in the here and now," I said to him. He handed me the Heavyweight Title. "You good?"

"I'm great." He pulled his shirt off and handed it to me. "Treat me to dinner when I win."

"I'll treat you to ice cream, and that's it. Keep both titles, and I'll get you dinner. Now go kick his ass."

He grinned and held the ropes open for me to exit the ring. "You're the best, dollface!"
"Don't call me dollface," I yelled as I jumped down from the apron. The bell rang.

John and Seth circled each other, and then they were at it, exchanging blows. The plan was to end it as quickly as possible, but Seth seemed to forget that when he had John on the mat and started trash talking him.

"Damnit, Rollins! Quit fooling around!"

The jerk winked at me. Winked. And then he tried to do the Five Knuckle Shuffle on John. It didn't work, of course.

His attempt for a Buckle Bomb didn't work either, for that matter. John turned it into a Huricarana and hurled Seth into the turnbuckle at the last second.

I ran to the side of the ring closest to him. "Rollins? You ok?"

"Ugnnn…"

I touched his outstretched palm gently. "Hey… you ok?"

"Yeah… I think so."

He got back up, but John kept sending him back down. Seth was getting frustrated and losing focus fast. When John went to the top rope, possibly for a Splash, Seth recklessly charged at him. He stopped John, and Superplexed him, then immediately lifted him up and slammed him down for a Falcon Arrow. That's the combo he did before…

It wasn't enough. Nothing he did was enough. John just could not be stopped tonight. Seth tried. He really did. But John was working on another level. He hit the AA, and pinned Seth cleanly for the win. I jumped into the ring to check on Seth while the referee awarded John the title.

"You ok for the next match?" I asked.

"Fuck… this… shit," he growled, getting to his feet slowly.

"Rollins…"

"No! Don't 'Rollins' me! I can't do this! This is too much!" He walked to the ropes and slipped through. Grabbing his remaining title from the timekeeper's area, he held it to his chest like it was his precious. "I'm out of here."

I just sighed. I had to admit, I wasn't feeling as confident as I had been earlier in the evening. I watched Seth around the ring and towards the ramp, right to a waiting John Cena. Shit…

"Where ya going? I thought you were The Man? I thought you had this?" John yelled.

"Shut up! Shut up! You can't make me do this!" Seth yelled back.

"Oh no?" John grabbed Seth and hoisted him onto his shoulders for another AA, right onto the padded floor. I winced. John then picked Seth up and threw him back into the ring, right at my feet.

"There you go! Just stay right there and wait for Sting like a good boy."

I knelt beside him. "Hey, I'm here, Seth, I'm right here." I watched John leave, holding the US Title up in triumph. "What do you need me to do?"

"Fuck… I don't know. I thought I had him… Bastard wouldn't stay down…"
The caw of a crow was heard. "Oh no…" I whispered. Sting emerged from the back, clad in a long red robe, looking majestic. And dangerous. "Seth, get up! You have to get up!" I pulled him up to his feet. He was a little wobbly, but mostly able to stand on his own.

Then Sting was in the ring, removing his robe, and running at us as the bell rang. "Shit!" Seth pulled me into the corner to protect me from Sting's attack, his body taking the brunt of it. "Get out of the ring, now!"

I kissed Seth quickly and slipped out between the ropes. Any strategy we had come up with went straight out the window. Seth was struggling just to keep up with Sting. "Come on, create some separation!" I yelled.

It took him a few moments, since he was caught and put into the Scorpion Deathlock, but he broke the hold by grabbing the ropes. Once back on his feet, he dropkicked Sting, sending him across the ring. I got to him as quickly as I could.

"Breathe, Rollins, breathe. We went over this. Slow him down, get him to your pace. You can do this."

"You sure?" he wheezed.

"Yeah. I'm sure. You can do this. I believe in you." I did believe in him, but I also knew this was going to be an extremely challenging match and he'd have to pull out all the stops in order to win it.

"Well… then I have to, don't I?" He gave me a weak smile, just as Sting went after him again. Seth dodged and ducked under the ropes. Sting tried to pull him in over the top, but Seth grabbed Sting by the head and dropped to the floor. Sting staggered back, giving Seth time to climb to the middle rope. He jumped, aiming for a Crossbody, but Sting rolled through and pinned him. Seth kicked out in a panic.

I clapped for him. "Nice job! You got this!" I yelled as encouragingly as possible. Seth was completely off his game. It continued as he was thrown out of the ring. Seth tried to crawl away, but Sting easily caught him. "Come on, Rollins! Stop messing around!"

He glared at me for that one, right before getting thrown into the steel steps. Sting picked him up and threw him into the other set of steel steps as well, then tossed him into the ring. Sting followed him, but Seth pounced, kicking Sting in the stomach and trapping him in the corner. He began to stomp on Sting as the ref counted to five. He stopped when the ref reached four and a half. Grabbing Sting, he pulled the older man out of the corner and tried to whip him across the ring, but Sting countered and it was Seth who went flying. He managed to hang onto the ropes instead of bouncing off of them, but Sting charged at him with a Clothesline, sending Seth over the top. Seth got to his knees and started crawling towards the announce tables. I had to move out of the way, but I desperately wanted to grab Seth and get him out of there. He grabbed one of their monitors, I can only assume he meant to hit Sting with it. Sting grabbed Seth by the hair, making Seth drop the monitor, and then threw him into the barricade. Then picked him up, ran him across the ringside area and face first into the other barricade. It took Seth more than a few agonizing moments before he could get up, only to have Sting "help" him back into the ring, just in time to beat the ref's countout.

Seth got to his knees as Sting stalked him, mumbling, "No, stop… please don't…"

"Come on, Seth! You can do this! Turn this around!" I screamed.
Sting grabbed Seth's raised hand and twisted it hard, making Seth scream in pain, then socked Seth right in the face. Seth stumbled. I had to turn away momentarily. It was painful to watch as Sting literally threw Seth around. *Come on… find the hole in his defense!*

Seth rolled out of the ring and tried to escape over the barricade behind the announce tables, but he was too slow and Sting easily caught up with him. He was dragged up onto the English announce table, Sting standing over him like he was already the victor. I clutch at the ring post in anger, watching and feeling helpless. *Now! His guard is down!*

Then Seth shoved Sting with all his might, sending the man into the Spanish announce table, and his head right onto the corner of one of the monitors.

There was a collective pause throughout the arena. The ref ran to check on him. Seth looked at the scene in a shock, then got up on wobbly legs and started walking around the ring towards the ramp. I ran after him. "Rollins?"

"No more… he's down… and I'm out of here," he said, grabbing his title from where it had fallen earlier when John AA'ed him. He looked down at the title in his hands, and then over to where Sting was. The ref was helping him up. It was clearly a struggle, but Sting wouldn't give up. "That fucker…" Seth said softly. Something lit in his eyes. Something that scared me. "No… I'm going to finish this. Finish him."

"Wha… Seth…? Seth!"

He ignored me, shoved the title into my hands and took off, making a beeline straight for Sting. He picked Sting up easily and slammed him down onto the broken announce table, then picked him up again and threw him into the ring. "Count it!" he yelled at the ref, pinning Sting.

Somehow, and I honestly have no idea how he managed to still have the wherewithal, Sting kicked out.

The crowd cheered. Seth did not. He was *pissed.* Getting to his feet, he started stomping on Sting, yelling at him. "You want to come into my house, take my title, my place in WWE?! Think again, old man! This is it for you!"

Sting got up. Seth ran and bounced off the ropes for his attack, a Slingblade that knocked Sting over and sent him down to the mat. Seth pinned him again, but again Sting kicked out. Next was a Falcon Arrow, but still Sting kicked out.

"You think you're better than me? Huh? Huh?! You're not! You're--"

Sting got a good jab in to Seth's face, then another, and another. He got to his feet, but had a momentary pause. Seth took advantage and kicked Sting in the stomach, then hoisted him up. He ran and threw Sting into the turnbuckle for a Buckle Bomb. Sting collapsed like a sack of potatoes, giving Seth the opportunity to grab him by the arm and drag him to the middle of the ring, but the pin was surprisingly unsuccessful.

His frustration was clearly building. "Come on, don't let your emotions run away with you!" I yelled. "Find your center!"

"I'll find your fuckin' center!" he yelled back, but then he gave a ragged chuckle. Sting had crawled to the ropes to use them to stand up. Seth went after him, tried to Pedigree him, but was sent over the ropes instead. Seth jumped onto the ropes, possibly for a Crossbody, but Sting caught him and *shoved* him backwards. Seth's head hit the barricade with a sickening thud.
"Seth!" I screamed, and ran to his side. I held his hand, "Seth, Seth, squeeze my hand to let me know you're ok!"

"Ugh, stop shouting, dollface," he groaned, squeezing my fingers in his. "Nice of you to worry, but I'm fine. Might need an icepack later, I think I feel a knot on my head…"

I breathed a sigh of relief as he got to his feet. "I'll make sure the med team gets on that. Are gonna be ok going back in there?"

"Yeah. It's not that I need to win. It's that I need to beat him." Seth squeezed my hand. "Cheer for me, dollface."

"I'll be the loudest one here."

Seth crawled back into the ring and went right after Sting, but Sting had regained whatever wits he had lost and was presenting a strong defense. Seth soon found himself being sent over the ropes again. Sting jumped from the top of the ring post right onto Seth, which sent both of them crashing to the mats. Once he had Seth back into the ring, he sent him into the corner and gave him a Stinger Splash. I heard the air leave Seth's body on that one. A DDT sent Seth hard to the canvas and Sting pinned him.

"Come on, Rollins!" I yelled from my spot outside the ring.

He got his foot on the rope right before the three-count. It was too close for my liking. Sting got up, discouraged by the failure. He waited for Seth, and as soon as Seth got up, Sting ran him into the corner for another Stinger Splash. He jumped onto the bottom rope so that he could gain some height on Seth and punch him repeatedly in the face. Seth blocked as best he could and grabbed Sting for another Buckle Bomb. He ran the short distance and launched Sting into the opposite post.

But something wasn't right. I've seen so many Buckle Bombs in my time with Seth, with the Shield, with FCW, that the instant he hit that turnbuckle, I knew that something had gone wrong. His eyes… They were glassy, unfocused. He was struggling to even take a step. Seth grabbed him, and he fell to the side. It seemed like his body had suddenly become too heavy for him to support it. Seth sent him into the ropes, intending to clothesline him as he bounced off, but Sting ducked underneath Seth's arm. Not because he meant to, but because his legs gave out.

I saw the flash of worry on Seth's face, but then he changed it, lifting his arms to the crowd and accepting their boos like they were accolades.

I bit my lip. Worried didn't even begin to cover how I felt as Seth strutted around the ring, taunting the audience. Sting was The Icon. The Legend. To go down on an injury… an accident in the ring… Not like this. Neither man deserves the match to end like this. I saw him wave off the doctor and the referee. "Let's get on with it!" he yelled.

They were back at it mere seconds later. "I'm gonna end this, Sting! Just you watch!"

Seth went for a pedigree, but Sting fought out of it. He slugged Seth hard, then caught Seth's legs as he fell, pulling him into the Scorpion Deathlock. I could hear Seth yelling in pain, see him trying to escape by grabbing at the bottom rope.

"Come on, Seth!" I screamed from the other side of the ring. "Reach!!"

He did, though it took a few more seconds that I liked. Sting broke the hold, but grabbed at Seth, bringing him to his feet. Seth kicked Sting in the stomach and went for the Pedigree again, but
Sting reversed it. He also went for the Scorpion Deathlock again, but Seth grabbed Sting's leg and rolled him over into a Small Package. The crowd chanted the ref's count.

One.

Two.

Three!

The arena went nuts. Most were crying foul, not believing that Sting had lost. Seth quickly let go of Sting and rolled out of the ring. I ran to his side, the title in hand. The ref and medics were rushing by to check on Sting. I hoped he would be ok, but I had other concerns at the moment.

"You did it!" I yelled, flinging myself onto Seth, hugging him. "You did it, you did it, you did it!"

"And you were worried…" he said with a tired smile.

"Like you weren't," I said. I hugged him again and sighed. "You really are something, you know that?" I said softly.

"Yeah… but I like hearing you say it… Ugh, help me up. I wanna celebrate." I helped him stand up, and he got back into the ring. Sting was already near the stage entrance, being watched by the medical personnel. Seth rolled back into the ring and held up his title. "I told you! I told all of you! Who's the Man?! Me! I'm the--"

Sheamus's music started to play and the big Irishman came running down the ramp with a referee in tow. No! I jumped into the ring just as Sheamus and referee did. Seth tried to attack Sheamus, but Sheamus dodged and delivered a Brogue Kick right to Seth's face, knocking him flat.

"Now! Start the match!" Sheamus was screaming at the ref.

"No! Do not start the match!" I yelled, scrambling into the ring and getting in between them.

"I'm sorry, ma'am, but I have to," the referee said. He really did look sorry about it. "The rules state--"

"Fuck the rules! You will not start this match! He just went through two!!"

"Quiet, you!" Sheamus yelled at me, pushing me back against the ropes. "T'is match is starting, an' I'll be damned if--"

Explosions were heard from the ramp. We all looked over in unison to see flames dance across the monitors. It… It can't be!! But it was definitely him.

Kane. But not the Kane I knew and called friend. No… it was Demon Kane.

Kane was walking down the ramp towards us. Though the heat from the flames warmed the arena, I could only feel coldness settle over me. Sheamus grew even paler, if that was possible. Both he and the ref left the ring immediately. I couldn't move as Kane entered between the ropes. He didn't look at me, just at Seth, who was still lying in the middle of the ring. It should have been no surprise when Kane grabbed Seth by the throat, picked him up and Chokeslammed him back into the mat, but it was. I screamed. Sheamus seemed to think Kane was there to help him and got back in the ring.

"One more time, Kane," Sheamus said. "One more time, and then I'll get him with a knee--"
Sheamus was grabbed and Chokeslammed as well, tossed out of the ring like a child's toy.

I was having a hard time breathing as the fear had taken complete hold of me. "K-Kane?" I whispered, but he didn't hear me.

He went to pick up Seth again, but this time, I jumped in front of him to stop him. And got grabbed by the throat. Kane lifted me up like I was nothing. Nothing. My feet were dangling in mid-air as I gasped for breath. He stared at me, tilting his head to the side.

"K-Kane!" I choked out. My fingers clawed at his hand and was doing nothing to affect him. "S-stop! Please!"

"You..." He seemed to recognize me, but that didn't make me feel any better. This wasn't Kane, this wasn't my friend. It was HIM. The other one, the one that threatened me so many years ago, the monster that the Shield had clashed with. "Get. Out," he growled, and shoved me aside.

I couldn't think, couldn't protest. My legs were moving without me controlling them. I was out of the ring and walking away, then running. I couldn't look back, I couldn't save Seth. I was back where I started, that weak little girl who cowered behind her brothers and her best friend. As soon as I got backstage, I ran even faster. I didn't know where I was going, just that I had to get away from him.

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I don't know how long I was there, but I was still shaking when Seth found me, hidden behind an equipment box. "Dollface... come here," he said softly, but firmly. I shook my head, hugging my knees to my chest even tighter than before. "Hey... Please? Come here?"

"I... I c-can’t..." I sobbed. "I'm s-sorry... I'm sorry... I can’t..."

Seth was quiet, then crawled into the space next to me, pulling me onto his lap and rubbing my back. It was a bit snug, but I hugged him tightly, burying my face in his chest. He hadn't showered yet, but he was wearing one of his Blackcraft shirts. It was soft and felt nice against my skin. His scent wasn't bad, just strong. "I got you. I got you," he whispered to me. I let myself relax against him, let the memory of Demon Kane be wiped from my mind for the moment. It wasn't like I hadn't known about him before, but the guys had always protected me from Demon Kane. And of course, that was before I got to know Kane, Corporate Kane, as a person, as the man I called my friend. I had become relaxed and forgotten how terrifying he could truly be. I had forgotten how much of a monster the Demon was, of that other side of him. Here, behind the boxes, away from the hubbub of the backstage area, there was only Seth, and he would protect me from the monsters. Childish, I know, but at that moment, I didn't care.

"What happened?" I asked softly. "After I... left."

"Dunno when you left, but got Chokeslammed. Then a Tombstone Pile Driver... I was carried backstage, I think. Came to in medical, and realized you were missing."

"Oh..." I didn't know what else to say.

“Roman and Dean... they wanted to look for you, too, but the Wyatts are still watching them,” he said. He sounded tired. I looked up at him and noticed the dark circles under his eyes. They were worse than before. “They sent Renee, Becky, and Paige in their place. Paige was the one that told me. Surprised I found you first.” He pulled out his phone and sent a quick text message. "Had to let the girls know. They'll tell Dean and Roman."
“Oh… ok…” I relaxed a little more into his embrace. "How did you find me?"

He shrugged, pausing only momentarily in the slow back rub. “You like small spaces. I remembered how you fell asleep in the leg space of the bus that one time. Remember? You used my leg as a pillow. Woke up super refreshed. I asked you how you could possibly sleep like that and you said it was strangely comfortable.” It was comfortable, and small spaces felt safe. I don’t know why, but they did. “Tried it myself once, and frankly I didn't get it, but it stuck with me. After I couldn't find you in the obvious places, I thought about it, remembered that, and figured you might try to hide in a similar spot, so I just followed the path you would have taken and looked in every small space I could find. Only took me three tries.”

“You know me so well,” I said, trying to laugh.

He shook his head. “If I did, would have caught you before you had a chance to hide.”

"You were a bit preoccupied," I reminded him.

He shrugged. "You always seem so strong. Hard to tell when you're not.” He nuzzled my cheek, his beard tickling my skin and the scent of cinnamon surrounding me. “Next time, just come to me. Ok? If you have to run, then run, but come back to me. Promise me you'll come back to me.”

“I promise…” I fell silent for a bit, then asked, "Is he gone?"

"Kane? Yeah, made sure of that while I was looking for you. Almost everyone else has left, by the way. Except that one nurse that likes to smoke out back, I think.”

"Oh… Oh!!! I should have gone with you to medical…” He had been pile drove into the mat. "How's the bump on your head?"

He hugged me tighter. "It's fine. And yeah, maybe you should have, but you had other things on your mind. Don't worry about it. I'm not mad or anything. Kinda tired though.”

"I guess… we should get going…"

"Nah, we can stay like this for a bit longer. You smell so nice…” He sounded sleepy. "Hey, I know, you can stay with me tonight. I got the two beds. That way, you don't have to be alone. I'm ok with snuggling on one bed though. For your sake."

"Thanks, but I already agreed to room with Paige tonight." I snuggled closer into Seth's embrace. "She's kind of down about the fact that Charlotte won her match… She's happy for her, I mean, but…”

"But she wanted to be the one to beat Nikki," Seth finished for me.

"Yeah." I felt a lot calmer. "We really should get going. I don't want to get locked in the arena."

"Yeah, ok." He sounded half asleep. "Hey, would you mind driving? Feeling a little out of it… You're like a little stuffed bear… so comfy…"

I rolled my eyes, but then smiled. I was feeling a lot better if I could feel annoyance at Seth. "Yeah, sure. I can drive us."

^v^v^v^v^v

Raw - September 21, 2015
Someone called my name. I turned to see Kane, no longer in his Demon persona, but I stiffened all the same. The memory of yesterday was still quite fresh. “Yes?” I asked, ready to bolt.

“I wanted to apologize, about earlier, yesterday. I heard you went missing right after the Demon appeared…” He looked around. “Let's talk in my office. More privacy there.”

I was hesitant but nodded and followed him. My nerves were on high alert as the door closed behind us.

“I just want you to know, the Demon would never hurt you,” Kane said. “You're a good person. Always have been. Honest. Kind. Straight forward. It's mind boggling that you were part of the Shield back in the day, and still hang out with them now. The Demon… He has no business with you, despite your association with Seth.”

“Kane…” Was he really going to deny that he and the Demon were the same person?

He held up his hand. “And he wants you to know that should you ever need him, you can call on him. Using this…” He handed me a black medallion. It had strange, blood red markings on it. “Keep it on you. And, you know I wouldn't hurt you, right? We… We're still friends, aren't we?”

It was hard to separate Demon Kane and Corporate Kane, if I was being completely honest, but the Kane I was familiar with, despite everything else, had never directed his anger towards me, had always taken care to make sure I was ok in the fallout of anything he did. Even when he threatened me during his and Daniel's feud with the Shield. Last night, he had scared me, yes, but he hadn't actually hurt me. Had made me leave the ring. For my own safety, I realized. “Yes…” I said softly. “I think so… I think that I know you wouldn't hurt me. You're just about the only person in the Authority that I respect because of that. I'm not sure I actually consider you part of them anymore.”

He smiled at me, bright and genuine. “You have no idea how happy that makes me. And don't worry, I won't tell Steph or Hunter.”

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"Bray's talking shit," I muttered.

"Talk shit, get hit," Paige said, leaning on my shoulder. We were watching the monitors backstage. Bray was in the ring, speaking utter garbage about my brothers, while Luke and Braun flanked him.

"Nice. I like it. Especially since Roman will--" His music blared over the speakers. "And there he goes."

Roman challenged Bray to a fight. Not a match, a fight. One on one with Roman, no referees, no backup, just an all out brawl. Bray sent Luke and Braun out of the ring, but not even five minutes later, both men were back in there, cornering and beating on Roman. "Don't even think about it," I heard growled behind us. I turned to see Seth standing there.

Paige gave an exasperated sigh. "We weren't--"

"You weren't. She was," he said, pointing at me. I crossed my arms over my chest and turned back to the monitor with a huff. "That's what I thought. Paige, could you give us a minute?"

"No."

I snorted a laugh at that. Of course Paige didn't want to miss out on the conversation.
"Paige…" Seth said, a warning note in his voice.

"Is it really that secretive?" I asked. He didn't answer. "Is it about Kane?"

"Yes," he grumbled.

I sighed. "Fine. Let's go. I'll see you later, Paige." We walked down the hallway. "What do you want to talk about?"

"He's here. I can sense his demonic presence."

Snorting a laugh, I said, "No, you can't."

"Ok, fine, but I know he's here. I want to talk to Hunter and Stephanie about this. Kane is not going to get away with this." He stopped walking and I saw we were in front of the office where Kane had spoken to me earlier. "So, you with me?"

"Uh, sure, but I think I should tell you--"

Seth opened the door and went in. "Guys! We really need to talk. He's here, I can feel it, and he's been a…" Seth's voice trailed off. I sighed heavily and walked in after him, unsurprised to see that Kane was there, smiling broadly at Seth.

"Oh, hi, Seth!" Kane's smile seemed a bit more genuine when he looked at me. "Didn't hear you knock. How're you doing? Great match last night, by the way. I really liked--"

"What, uh… what are you doing here?" Seth said. He hadn't seemed to have gotten over his shock yet.

"Well, I work here, Seth," Kane said, still smiling broadly. "You ok? Didn't hit your head too hard, did you?" He reached for Seth's head to inspect it, but Seth ducked away.

"Work here? You work here?! After what you did to me last night?!” he demanded.

Kane made a comical frowny face. "I have no idea what you're talking about Seth. I wasn't working last night."

So he is going to maintain that Corporate and Demon are separate. Ok. Well, that's… interesting, I thought.

"If you recall, I've been off recuperating since someone broke my ankle several months ago. My dear friends were kind enough to check up on me and keep me in the loop of what was going on in the office." He smiled at me, again seeming more genuine than when he looked at Seth. "Thank you for that, again."

"Not a problem, I was happy to help you, Kane," I said. Seth just stared at me, possibly thinking I had lost it since I wasn't reacting the same way he was.

"Checkin-- Oh, right… Lesner… Brock Lesner broke your ankle, and I… Look, man, I want to apologize, I should have just-- What happened afterwards, it was in the heat of the moment, and I--"

Kane held up his hand, interrupting Seth. "Don't worry about that. Frankly, I've done the same thing myself so I can't exactly hold it against you. Besides, I've been cleared by medical, I have my contract to be Director of Operations and I'm back at work! Couldn't be happier! Didn't you get the
email?"

Seth stared at Kane, not sure what to think, then turned to me. "Email?"

There had been no email. I had double checked last night after I had gotten to the hotel. "I can't control what you listen to when I talk." However, messing with Seth is one of my favorite things to do, so I went with the opportunity that Kane was presenting me. Technically, I wasn't lying to him. Besides, I would tell him later. Probably.

Seth looked panicked. It was adorable. "Wh-where's Triple H and Stephanie?" he asked.

"They have yet to arrive. But I can help you!" Kane was just so cheerful, it was hard to not smile.

"I feel like… I should just wait for them…?" Seth started backing away.

"Oh, sure, of course. Whatever you want, Champ. Oh, but before you go, and you'll need to hear this too," he said, indicating me. "I've arranged for your rematch for the US Title against John Cena."

Seth nodded dumbly. "Oh good… good… when…"

"Tonight. In the main event of Raw," Kane continued.

"Right… right…" Seth nodded again, then left. Just like that.

"You the man, Seth! Go get 'em!!" Kane shouted after him. "Think he'll be ok? He seems a bit off," he said to me.

I laughed. "I'm sure he'll be fine." I bid Kane a goodbye and ran after Seth.

Once I did find him, there was no stopping him. He stalked the hallways of the arena, asking every staff member he saw until he found Stephanie and Hunter. "Oh thank goodness you guys arrived," he said.

"Hello to you too, Seth," Stephanie said wryly. "What's wrong?"

"I have been waiting and searching for you guys. Can you believe what's going on? Can you explain what's going on? Why did you reinstate Kane? He tried to end my career last night!"

Hunter's head tilted in curiosity. "What? What are you talking about? What do you mean Kane is here?"

"He's in the office," I said. "And he made a rematch for tonight, Rollins versus Cena for the US Title."

"Yes! He made that match, and you saw what I went through last night! I'm not in any condition to go through with it. And he has no right to even be--"

"Calm down, Seth. He's in our office? Right now?"

Seth threw his hands up in the air, his title nearly falling from his grasp. "Yes, and he's saying he's director of operations, and he even has a little mug…"

"Wish I had a mug," I muttered. Seth elbowed me. "Sorry. Not the point."

"Well, Seth," Hunter said, looking amused. "I think that since Kane made the match, you should
focus your energy and mind on that."

"I… I should?" he asked. I was as surprised Seth looked. He had been put through the ringer last night, but Hunter wanted him to compete again so soon?

"Yes," Stephanie confirmed. "You have a chance to take back your US Title. Let us worry about Kane, and you worry about bringing that championship back to the Authority. Ok?"

"Yeah… sure… I guess."

I followed Seth, only sparing a quick glance to Hunter and Stephanie. They were talking in hushed, incredulous-looking, whispers.

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Charlotte's celebration was something I did not want to miss, but oh man, I wish I had. Seth had wandered off, so I was alone as I watched in horror as Paige grabbed the microphone and started raging at Charlotte and then at Becky. I couldn't quite catch my breath as she verbally attacked her two friends. Former friends? I thought, feeling faint. I felt my body trembling, shaking. I couldn't stop it, couldn't stop the feeling that I was falling.

Strong hands caught me by my arms and lowered me into a nearby chair. "You ok?" Kane asked. Looking up at him, I could only shake my head. "No."

"You gonna be ok?"

"Maybe… probably…" I muttered. "I don't know. I just… watching that play out on the screen…"

"It was like when Seth turned on the Shield," Kane said, taking a seat next to me. I leaned forward, elbows braced on my knees and face buried in my hands.

"Yeah… It was." I took a deep breath. "Will I ever not have a reaction to it?"

Kane looked thoughtful. "I don't know. It was a particularly traumatic event for you. Roman and Dean… they got angry, got even, but you… You disappeared." I looked over at him in surprise. "I didn't think anyone outside my circle noticed."

"I only did because Seth kept looking for you. Not around Hunter or Stephanie. The topic of you specifically seemed to be a sore point." He sighed. "Look, I'm still not over some of the things that my brother did to me, but… he's still my brother. And Seth is still… your Seth."

"He is not my Seth," I said, rolling my eyes. "He's like a cat. Belongs to no one."

Kane laughed. "But you have forgiven him for it, haven't you? As far as I could tell, you guys seem to be on pretty good terms."

I nodded. "Yeah, just bad memories linger, that's all. It's like a wound that hasn't quite healed yet. It's been more than a year now."

"Wounds like that take more than a year to heal, if at all. But you've got your brothers, you've got your friends, right? And we're here to help you." Kane gave me a small, encouraging smile. I returned it and hugged him.

"Thanks, Kane. I really needed to hear that."
"So I was thinking-- Oh, hi, guys!"

Kane and I had talking in the Authority's office, about his other ideas for the evening's show, when Stephanie and Hunter walked in. "Kane, this is… such a surprise." Stephanie looked at me. "You knew he was here? We've been looking for him."

"We ran into each other just a little while ago," Kane said. I mean, technically, an hour could be described as "a little while", right? In the grand scheme of time, the universe and everything. "I've been bouncing ideas off of her since then."

"Tonight seems like it will be very exciting," I said with a practiced smile.

"Yes, well, Kane," Hunter said, dismissing me from his notice, "You doing good? You feel good?" He gestured to Kane's leg.

"Yes! Leg is all healed up. Feeling good, looking good," Kane said, straightening his tie. "But best of all, I'm so happy to be back here at work."

Hunter nodded. "Yeah, about that… about being back here, at work…"

"Is something wrong?" Kane asked innocently. "Oh, are you guys mad that I made the rematch for Seth's title tonight? I'm sorry, I just… with it being my first night back, I really wanted to jump right in and make a big splash! I can delay it if you--"

"No, no," Stephanie said. "The match is fine. A really great idea, it's just…" She bit her lip as she considered her words. "It's just that we haven't heard from you, since you got hurt--"

"The phone works both ways," Kane said, still smiling. "I haven't heard a peep from anyone in the Authority during my recovery time."

I had to hide my smile. It was nice to know that Kane didn't consider me part of the Authority either.

"Yes… well," Hunter said, looking uncomfortable. "Considering the lack of contact, and the fact that you showed up last night…"

"Last night? I wasn't here last night." Kane looked genuinely confused, which just confused me as well. During his recovery time, I hadn't noticed any mental deficiencies when I visited. He was either lying, missing pieces of his memory… or he's telling the truth and he is no longer Demon Kane. Which was the least likely of the possibilities, but still, considering the Wyatts could warp space to teleport and Finn Balor in NXT had fought, defeated and harnessed a Demon King's powers, it was still a possibility. A scary possibility, since it meant a Demon was loose without a vessel.

Stephanie wrinkled her nose, making an incredulous face in that Don't bullshit me way she did. "Ok, Kane, we get it. You're mad at Seth for all the torment he put you through, you want a little revenge, play some mind games… that's fine… we understand that."

It was my turn to make an incredulous face. It was fine that Kane was messing with Seth? They understood that?! I personally did think he had some of it coming, considering how he had treated Kane and had refused to go with me to go see him, but it was definitely not fine for Stephanie or Hunter to be saying that. At least I told Seth to his face when he deserved something, while they were doing this behind his back.
"But Kane," Stephanie continued, "Don't insult our intelligence and try to play mind games with us."

"Oh, of course, I would never!" Kane exclaimed. "I love my job too much. It's why I signed a contract to be Director of Operations, and I will fulfill my duties to the best of my abilities. It's what's best for business, and I know how much you guys believe in that."

The vein in Hunter's forehead twitched. "Look--"

"Ah, ah, ah," Stephanie interrupted, pushing Hunter back a little. "Let's just… cool our heads. Kane, Hunter… and you," she said, looking at me. "Let's just all agree to put the past behind us. To move forward together, and make this a unified front. We're all gonna get on the same page, right?"

"Yes, of course," Kane agreed.

I shrugged and said, "Ok…?"

Stephanie looked thrilled with our answers. "Good, good… there's just one thing, so that we can all be in on this, on the same page." She looked at Hunter, who nodded encouragingly at her. "We need it back." She held out her hand.

Kane looked at her extended hand, then smacked her palm with his own, and gave them a thumbs up. Stephanie was annoyed.

"No… Kane. I don't need you to 'give me five'. I need you to return it," she said, her patience wearing thin. "Your mask."

"What mask?" he asked.

"I think she means the red one you wore," I said, and then pointed at the empty glass case the Authority usually carried it in. It was always set in their office like some damn trophy no matter what arena we were in. "The one that usually goes there."

"Oh my gosh! The mask is missing?!" Kane exclaimed. "Stephanie, I haven't touched that mask since I gave it to you, when I swore my loyalty to the Authority." There was just a hint of menace in Kane's voice as he spoke, but it steadily grew as he continued. "Now… if it's missing… then it's easy to see… you have a very big problem."

Stephanie's eyes went wide and Hunter leaned in protectively behind her.

Kane's visage changes suddenly to his previous cheerful mood. "BUT, I will be happy to help look for it, and if I find it, you two will be the first to know! It's good seeing you again, and I hope you have a great night! I've got some business to take care of, so I will see you later." Kane grinned, patted me on the shoulder and left.

Stephanie and Hunter stared off in the direction that Kane went, and then looked at me. I didn't know what they were thinking, but I had a feeling it would best to get out of there as quickly as possible. "Uh, I should… I should go check on Rollins…?" I waved at them and hurried away.

**********

Natalya was back! I saw her talking to Paige. As quietly as I could, I snuck up to them. "I get what you're saying," Nattie said, "you're frustrated, and it sucks, but news flash, everyone is. Do you think you're the only one who's frustrated?"

"By Kane," Stephanie continued, "Don't insult our intelligence and try to play mind games with us."

"Oh, of course, I would never!" Kane exclaimed. "I love my job too much. It's why I signed a contract to be Director of Operations, and I will fulfill my duties to the best of my abilities. It's what's best for business, and I know how much you guys believe in that."

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Paige scoffed. "You haven't even been here!"

"I was taking care of my husband, who is doing much better, thank you very much for asking. You would know that if you had gotten your head out of your ass long enough to consider the people around you. Now, I have a match tonight against Naomi that I need to prepare for. I hope you think about what I said."

Natalya walked away. I would talk to her later. There was time, but right now, I needed to speak to Paige.

"Paige?"

She turned to me, and her face hardened. "Not now. Just… not now," she said, and walked away as well.

**********

The Wyatts took over the video feed yet again. With a message to Randy Orton, warning him for interfering in their business. Apparently, I had missed out on Randy coming out to save Roman and Dean earlier in the evening. I was not pleased, to say the least, but since the Wyatts had attacked Randy a few weeks ago, I could understand why he would be helping my brothers. They had a common goal, a common enemy. I didn't like it, but there wasn't much I could do about it.

Randy had enough on his plate now that the Wyatts had him in their sights.

**********

"Hey, you good?" Seth asked me.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Why?"

Seth shrugged. "The thing with Paige and Charlotte earlier. I heard… I heard you had a reaction to it," he said carefully.

"Ah… yeah, a bit." I looked down at his shoes, then lightly tapped them with my own. "I could use a hug though, if you'd be so willi-- oof!" Seth had grabbed me tightly.

"Wanted to hug you this entire time, but wasn't sure it'd be welcome," he said.

I laughed softly and wrapped my arms around him. "You could always just ask if I need one, weirdo."

"Noted. You coming out to the ring tonight?"

"Yeah. Gotta film this one. Forgot yesterday in all the excitement."

"... and you're going out there to cheer me, too, right?"

"Maybe."

"Brat…"

I grinned.

**********
"Uh, are you sure you're good?" I asked Seth. He was limping as we walked down to the ring. John was already in the ring, having requested to forgo the usual challenger goes out first.

"I'm fine. I wish I had some more time before the rematch, but... I can do this. I just... I need to bring John down to my level. I'm hurt, so he's gotta be handicapped."

"Just don't do anything to get yourself disqualified. I can get you a rematch later on if you should lose due to your injuries from yesterday, but not if you disqualify yourself."

Lillian introduced the two men, but before she could finish with John's introduction, Seth attacked him. He kept attacking him until the referee pushed him away.

"That's how you do it?" I asked him as the ref checked on John. I was holding my small video camera and it was already recording. I zoomed in on Seth's face as I asked, "Not a low blow when the ref wasn't looking?"

Seth shrugged. "Didn't think you'd like that. This is just as effective."

"I wouldn't have liked that," I said with a smile. "But you might not have made as big an impact as you would have liked."

John waved off the ref and the match started. Compared to their previous match the night before, this one was far less intense, but still rather entertaining. Unfortunately, in the end, John didn't just kick out of Seth's pin, he rolled out of it, taking Seth with him, and lifted Seth into the AA. A slam and a three count, and John retained his title clean.

He all but danced up the ramp as he left the ring, leaving Seth frustrated in the middle. I slid into the ring to help him to his feet. "That wasn't a fair fight!" Seth was screaming at John. "I was more hurt than you from yesterday!"

"Calm down, Rollins. I'm pretty sure I can get you another shot, we just--"

"Seth! Hey, Seth! Up here!"

We both looked up at the giant screen above the ramp to see Kane. "Uh... what?" I said softly.

"Since it's my first night back, I just wanted to tell you to be the best WWE World Heavyweight Champion you can be! But bear in mind, Seth, there's people lining up to take your championship away from you. People more deserving, people more angry, and some people you would never even imagine." Kane's friendly face changed. "Never... even... IMAGINE... Not even... in your worst... nightmares..."

"The fuck..."

Alarm bells were going off in my head. I pushed Seth to leave. "We should go... now."

"He's got to be delusional if he thinks he can take my--"

BOOM! Flames erupted from the stage and the entire arena was bathed in blood red light. "Rollins! We have to go!"

He looked around frantically, but it was too late. The Demon burst out of the ring mat and grabbed Seth's leg, knocking him down. Seth kicked the Demon in the face, and was able to get away for just a moment. Only a moment, because the Demon crawled out of the pit and grabbed Seth again, this time not letting go as he slid back down.
"SETH!" I grabbed at him, holding on to his arms, but to no avail. The Demon was too strong, and we were both pulled into the abyss.

**********

I woke up in the dark. A warm body was beneath me, strong arms holding me protectively. The scent of cinnamon tickled my nose. "Seth…?" I asked.

He breathed a sigh of relief."Dollface… you're awake. I was getting worried."

"Where are we?"

"Not sure. I thought we were just beneath the ring, since that's where Kane dragged us, but… we're not."

As comfortable and safe as I felt, I knew we had to get out of wherever this was, and quickly. "Have you tried looking around?"

"No. Can't see. Left my phone in my locker room, and I don't exactly carry a flashlight with me." He resisted a bit as I tried to get up, but ended up helping me. "What are you doing?"

I checked my pocket, and found what I was looking for. "Brace for light," I said, turning on the phone light. It illuminated what looked like a storage room, but more importantly, it helped us find a door. Checking it, I found it unlocked. It opened to a darkened hallway, the only light being emitted was from the exit sign. "Coast is clear."

Seth took my hand. "Hey, don't wander off. Can't afford to lose you right now."

I gave him a weary smile. "You'll be fine. C'mon, I think I know where we are."

"And where's that?" We started walking, using my phone as a flashlight. I didn't drop Seth's hand.

"Little used side hallway of the arena. This place is normally reserved for arena's day staff, I believe. Anyway, if I'm right--"

"You usually are."

"-- then if we turn here… tada! Main hallway. And I can see your locker room door from here." It was late. None of the main lights were on, only the utility lights. I checked my phone. "Oh, shit…"

"What?"

"It's past midnight." I scrolled through the dozen or so messages I had received. Everyone had been worried. I even had message from Dean, who hated texting unless it was necessary. I took a picture of Seth and myself. While he got our stuff, I sent it to each person who had been concerned, along with the message, No idea what happened, but we're both fine. Except the one from Kane. I wasn't sure how to respond to his query of Are you ok? Where did you go? There was also several missed calls from him, with the timestamps marking it right after Raw would have gone off the air.

We found the exit, and surprised a security guard who proceeded to scold us about staying behind for "hanky panky business". Despite my tiredness, or maybe because of it, I couldn't help but giggle about it all the way to the car.

In the end, I called Kane once I was in my hotel room. I was surprised he was still awake.

"Oh, thank goodness. When I heard you disappeared, I didn't know what to do."
"Kane…" I said. I was too tired for his games. "Just… Whatever you're doing, please be careful. Revenge tends to have a way of backfiring."

"What revenge?" he asked. Innocently, I might add.

I sighed. "Goodnight, Kane."

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - September 24, 2015

"Ow… Ow… Ow…"

"Oh my god, I didn't even hit you that hard," I said, rolling my eyes at Seth. We were walking into the arena together after a mildly unsuccessful sparring session. It was my first day sparring with a practice sword, but today had just gone a little… awry. At least he had won. What did I have? A loss and now a client trying to guilt trip me. Well, it had been a productive session, even with the mishaps. My instructor had been pleased with my progress overall, and I had felt confident enough to start studying swordwork. I still held that confidence, though I would be doing solo work just a little while longer before trying again in sparring. Looking over at Seth, I was certain he was playing up his injury.

"I think my spleen is broken…" he moaned, holding his side.

"Is that even where your spleen would be?" I asked. "I'm pretty sure that's the liver was right there."

Seth looked down and then started moaning, "Oh… my liver… it's broken…"

"Idiot…" I muttered, smiling. "Hey, Ro! Oh… oops… sorry, probably shouldn't say hi…"

"Baby girl!" He greeted me with a hug. "It's fine. I already checked, the Wyatts aren't here yet." His demeanor changed when he looked at Seth. "What happened to you?"

Seth just glared at him and kept on walking. "Don't mind him," I said. "I sort of got a lucky shot to his ribs, but he'll be fine."

"What?" Roman frowned. "How?"

I had been putting off telling Dean and Roman about my training with Seth. Now was as good a time as ever. "I, um… see, the thing is… my aikido training?" Roman nodded. He had been hesitant about it when I first started, but there wasn't much he could do about it. "Well, he's been sparring with me, for the past few months actually. It's been going really well, and today, I…" I trailed off. I could feel Roman's anger rolling off him in waves.

"He's been what?!" he barked loudly at me. I flinched. I never flinch at Roman, no matter how loud or angry he gets. But this was also the first time that I had been the one to make him angry in the first place. I had known he wouldn't like the fact that Seth was training with me, but I hadn't expected this much anger from him. Roman took a step towards me, then stopped. The tension was visible on his body, but he turned and walked away.

"Roman?" I called out after him.

"Fuck off!"

**********
Kane opened up the show, talking about how happy he was to be back, and about the matches for the evening. Roman had a match against Luke Harper, and while Dean was barred from ringside, so were Bray and Braun. I breathed a little easier when I heard that. I hadn't told Seth yet about what had happened. I was hoping to talk to Roman as soon as possible to sort things out, but Seth definitely noticed something was off with me. He looked like he wanted to say something, but didn't.

It didn't help that Seth had been antsy as soon as he saw Kane backstage, and he was pacing as we watched him talk on the monitor. He couldn't hold back his temper and called for his music to be played, interrupting Kane in the ring. I hurried alongside him as he marched out to the ramp stage. Kane actually looked happy to see Seth.

"Ladies and gentlemen! May I present your former United States Champion, but still your WWE World Heavyweight Champion! Seeeeeeth! Rolllllllllllllnnnnns!" he shouted.

"Cut the crap, Kane! This whole Bruce Banner, Jekyll and Hyde situation you've got going on, it's a joke and you're not fooling anyone. Underneath that cheap suit, you are the Demon."

Kane looked at us in confusion. "You seem upset, Seth. But fortunately, when I became Director of Operations, I took an extensive four-hour-class in conflict resolution. So let's hash this out!"

"Four hour… four hours is not enough for this, Kane!" Seth screamed.

Kane smiled. "Just come on down to the ring and we can engage in a healthy and hopefully productive dialogue."

"Oh, no no no no! You can't fool me. You must be insane to think that I would step inside a ring with you after what you did to me at Night of Champions!"

Kane shook his head, looking pensive. "I assure you I had nothing to do with Sheamus attempting to cash in his contract at that moment. I was just as surprised as everyone else."

"That is not what I'm talking about and you know it!" Kane tilted his head. He really did look confused. Seth growled. "Ok, fine! What about what you did to me just a few days ago on Raw? How do you explain that?"

"Seth," Kane said patiently, "I thought I was doing you a favor by giving you your rematch against John Cena. You can't blame me for--"

"NO! THAT'S NOT WHAT I--" Seth took a step back, breathed deeply, then said, "After my match! You dragged not just me, but my manager to… to… I don't even know where! But we found ourselves either transported through time, or space, or both and…"

"Seth, you kidder! I would never do that. I was really worried about you two. Heck, I scoured the entire building with security, and even called afterwards to make sure you were ok."

"He did, actually," I whispered to Seth. I had seen the emergency work order myself.

"I mean, come on, Seth. Who's standing right here in front of you?" The playful light left Kane's eyes, and his voice dropped to a more somber tone. "Is it a Demon…? Who came up from the depths of hell? And is determined to make your life as miserable as possible, to torment you with pain upon pain upon pain until you scream in agony?!"

Both Seth and I took a step back. "Uh… I don't think… I don't this was a good idea, Rollins…” I said quietly, not taking my eyes off of Kane.
"Or," Kane continued, his voice going up in pitch, becoming friendlier, "is it just a man in a suit? Your friend, and the man who helped you become WWE Champion?"

Seth stared at Kane. "Why are you doing this to me… I never did anything to you!" I glanced sideways at Seth.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" I hissed at him. Seth waved me off.

"I wasn't the one who broke your leg! Brock was! We covered this on Monday! In fact, I even gave you that vacation to Hawaii!"

"Well, yeah, that's true…" Kane said. Then he looked right in Seth's very soul. I could practically feel the heat in Kane's stare, despite not being the one it was directed at. "But you did once call me a seven-foot piece of crap. And constantly belittled me in front of the WWE Universe, our bosses, our colleagues…" He smiled again. "But I know you were just trying to motivate me! To… to get me to do a better job as director." Kane's mood swings were really throwing me off.

"You… you've lost it, Kane…" Seth said. "You've lost your mind! And I hate to say it, but you're not fit for this job anymore. You are not welcome around me, around my title, and especially not around my manager. I don't care if you're the best of friends, you are a loose screw and therefore a danger!"

"Rollins, please don't antagonize him…"

"No, I am not saying this to be mean, I am saying this as a colleague, as a friend, as someone who cares about… both of you. Kane… you need help. Serious, professional help."

I sighed and covered my face with my hand. "And you just antagonized him…"

Kane was still smiling. "I'm sorry you feel that way, Seth. I promise I will take your concerns under advisement."

Seth threw his hands up in the air and turned to leave. "So he's going to ignore it!" he said to no one in particular.

"Hold on there, Seth. You interrupted me before I could say the last match of the night. In the main event, it will be you… versus a man you know very well, a man you once called brother, Dean Ambrose, the Lunatic Fringe!"

The crowd loved the announcement. Seth did not. "Kane!! What is wrong with you?!" he screamed, before stomping off.

**********

I stayed behind in gorilla. Seth didn't seem to notice, which was unsurprising considering how upset he was. I knew Roman's match was up first. He would be descending into the crowd to get to the ring, but he would have to come this way after the match. He had to. I watched the monitor anxiously.

"Ma'am, you ok?" one of the staff members asked me.

"Yeah, just…" I pointed at the screen. "You know?"

He smiled patiently, but I don't think he understood what I meant at all. I turned my attention back to the monitor in time to see Luke powerbomb Roman into the mat. Roman kicked out, and within
a minute, Superman punched Luke, and successfully pinned him. I hid as Luke came back first. I'm pretty certain he didn't see me at all. Roman, however… he saw me. His face hardened.

"You shouldn't be here," he growled.

"But… about earlier… I…"

"Get the fuck away from me."

It wasn't what he said. It was how he said it. Like he meant it, like he didn't want to see or hear from me ever again. I felt like my heart was breaking as he walked away from me.

**********

"Goddamn it! I cannot believe Kane! Who does he think he is?! Setting up this match is just completely stupid. I've beaten Dean, I'll beat him again. And… are you even listening to me?!"

"Yeah, of course. Kane is unbelievable, this match is stupid, you'll beat Dean." He squinted at me.

I just rolled my eyes. "I'm listening! I promise." We were sitting in his locker room, watching the live feed on mute. The New Day were well into a match with Neville and the Lucha Dragons.

"You're distracted. Have been since before the show started. Tell me why."

I shook my head and turned away. "It's nothing."

I found myself being pulled backward and down. Then Seth was hugging me as I sat on his lap.

"Hey… come on. You're usually berating me for not looking at matches as an opportunity. And you love watching Dean beat the crap out of me. Something's bothering you. Tell me? Please." His voice was soft and gentle, and his cinnamon scent was soothing.

I felt my breath hitch a little, as tears escaped my eyes. I hadn't even said anything yet, but the emotion I had been trying to keep back was already flooding to the forefront. "R-Roman… he… he hates me!"

"What? No way. Why would he hate you?"

I choked on a sob. The tears were flowing freely and I buried my face in Seth's shirt. "I t-told him about o-our training a-and… and he got so mad… he… he…" I sobbed again, unable to continue. Seth rubbed my back, waiting patiently for me to calm down. It took more than a few minutes. Actually, it took closer to twenty minutes. I saw Paige speak to Charlotte and Becky on the monitor, which didn't look like it went well, considering Natalya went out and Paige ended up slapping her. Then there was a tag match between the team of Kevin Owens and Rusev and the team of Ryback and Dolph.

"What did Roman say?" Seth asked quietly.

"He told me to fuck off…" I replied. I felt drained of all energy, all emotion. "And then to get the fuck away from him. He's never said that to me before. Plus the way he said it… And he didn't… he didn't call me 'baby girl'. He's never not called me that. But he didn't say it once, not since I told him." I closed my eyes and let Seth's hug continue to comfort me. "That told me more than anything else, to be honest."

"I see…" Seth kissed the top of my head. "It'll be ok."

"It doesn't feel like it."
He hugged me tighter. "I know. But it will be. I promise."

I wanted to believe him, but it was difficult.

**********

"Feeling better?" Seth asked me after his interview with JoJo. I had stood off to the side, only half listening. He had gone off about Kane again, but it was mostly the same stuff he had said to Kane's face.

I nodded. "A little. I think I'll stay back here though. I don't want to be a distraction for your match against Dean." I stood on my tiptoes to kiss his cheek. "Good luck out there. If I'm not in your locker room when you return, I might be staking out the parking lot, waiting for Roman." I held up my phone, showing him a text from Natalya. "Nattie's going to go with me."

He frowned. "Ok, but you see any Wyatts--"

"And I'll come running to you. I know. I will, I promise."

Seth grinned. "That's my girl."

**********

I couldn't pay attention to Seth and Dean's match, so I wandered over to the parking lot early. I sent a text to Natalya to let her know, and where I would be. I made sure I was in a spot that I could easily escape from, but was right in the way of anyone leaving to the parking area. A lot of people passed by me as I sat on a box in that hallway. Natalya joined me for a bit. She talked for the both of us, updating me on Tyson, on her cats. It was nice.

"You dun gone and messed up, kiddo."

I looked up, surprised to see that Dean had approached me, but not that Roman had told him. Natalya hugged me and left before I replied to Dean. "I didn't know it would be such a big deal…" I muttered. "How'd your match with Rollins go?"

"I won. Of course. Though, there may have been some extenuating circumstances. And… uh… Roman already left, just so you know," Dean said, taking a seat next to me. “Like, right after his match."

"Oh…" Of course. Should have known, I thought ruefully. He was angry, and would avoid me until he was ready to talk, if he ever was. "Aren't you supposed to be keeping a distance from me, too?"

"Yeah… didn't seem like a good idea at the moment though. So, why'd you do it? Why'd you accept the traitor's help and not ours?"

"I… I don't… I mean… it was just… easier."

"Easier? Easier how? He's as tough a fighter as we are, when he's not hiding behind the Authority." Dean seemed genuinely perplexed.

"I know, that's not what I meant… I mean…” What did I mean? I bit my lip as I thought. "I mean, it's easier because I don't care what he thinks of me, if I succeed or fail… but with you guys… I care, and I hold myself back. I'm scared of failing in front of you and having you pity me. And I know you'll go easy on me, because you don't want to hurt me."
"And he doesn't? Go easy on you, I mean."

"Nope. He doesn't want to hurt me either, but he's able to separate it more easily."

Dean leaned back against the wall, contemplating what I had said. "You kick his ass?"

"A few times, and only more recently."

Dean grinned. "Bet he doesn't like that."

"No. He does not." Seth did tend to get pouty when I beat him. It was hilarious. I smiled at Dean sadly. "I just didn't want to disappoint you or Ro. You guys are everything to me, and…" I sniffled, and wiped the tears that were beginning to form in my eyes. "I'm sorry… I wanted to tell you, I was just nervous and scared that you'd get mad. I didn't think Ro would be the one to… to…" I couldn't stop the tears from falling.

"Hey, kiddo," Dean said, wrapping me in a tight hug. "Don't cry. Roman… he's just being protective. Feels like you didn't trust us, but he loves you, you know that." I nodded, even though I was seriously doubting it at the moment. "And he'll get over it. I'll talk to him. Ok?" I nodded again. "You staying with the traitor tonight?"

"No. Got my own room, but that's kind of a good idea. I know he'd let me, and I don't want to be alone right now."

"Tell you what, you stay with Renee, I'll go hunker down with our Samoan, see if I can talk some sense into him. Y'all can have girl time or something. If it gets kinky, I want pictures."

"Idiot," I said with affection. "Hey, what were those 'extenuating circumstances' you mentioned?"

"Ah, well, Kane's music came over the speakers, entire arena went red, but he never showed, so I used it to my advantage, got the pin. The traitor was pissed." Dean chuckled. "Went off on a rant, but he's fine. No disappearance this time." Dean looked upset by that, and I could only laugh.

**********

The week ended with the usual non televised live events and several publicity events, as normal. Seth was… He was not as normal. We were walking to the car to meet Cesaro when he tripped, nearly crashing to the ground. I managed to catch him, and I could feel the tension in him releasing as his large body pressed against my smaller one. "Seth?" I ask, concerned not as his manager but as his friend.

His hands snaked around me, grasping me tightly. "Tired…" he whispered. "So tired, dollface… Can we get some coffee? Maybe an energy drink?"

This was definitely not normal. It wasn't like I hadn't noticed how tired he was all the time. Or how he was often dragging himself along. Or the amount of caffeine he drank to get the energy he needed. He was a determined man, and would brush away my concerns, always telling me he was fine. The most I could do was just watch out for him, but this was crossing the line and I would not let him get away with it any longer.

"Come on, let's get you to bed."

"Still need to go work out…” he mumbled. "There's a gym nearby… twenty-four hour place… got a crossfit area, sort of…"
Yeah, that wasn't going to happen, but I knew Seth would fight it if I denied him. “Ok, but I'm going with you. And I need to drop my stuff off at the hotel first. So let's go there, and then I'll drive you to crossfit?”

He nodded. Either I was getting better at lying or he was just too out of it to notice. Cesaro and I chatted on the short drive to the hotel, but I have no idea what we talked about. Cesaro helped me get Seth to my room. Seth didn't even seem to realize that he wasn't being checked in. Really, he didn't even put up a fight as I pushed him onto the bed. Or when I pulled his shoes and jacket off. Or when I tucked him in. I quickly changed into my pajamas and slipped under the covers, getting in close next to him, covering his chest with my arm and throwing one of my legs over his. If he really wanted to go workout, he would have been able to get away from me easily, but I would know if he did. He didn't even try and was snoring softly a few minutes later.

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The next morning, I woke up first. Seth had changed positions in the night, snuggling against me, and I (to my horror) was wrapped around him, his morning wood pressing into me exactly where it shouldn't have been. The only thing separating us was our clothing. Delicately, I disentangled myself from him. He groaned a bit, but I couldn't understand what he was saying. After showering in freezing water to cool myself off and then dressing, I saw that Seth was still not awake yet, so I went downstairs to grab some breakfast from the hotel's dining area and even got a plate for him. I made a call to Hunter while I was down there, but it didn't go the way I had hoped. Seth was hugging a pillow when I got back to the room and woke him.

He snorted awake. “Huh...where...?” He sniffed the air, reminding me of his dog, Kevin. “Coffee? Bacon?”

“Take a shower, Rollins. You stink. Then food.”

He rolled out of bed, grumbling to himself and went to the bathroom. I sat patiently in the sofa seat next to the window, typing notes into my tablet. I was going to make sure Hunter and Stephanie weren't running Seth ragged and that involved canceling a few events. I would hear the yelling later, but they were going to have to fire me to prevent me from taking care of him.

“Where's my bag?” Seth asked once he finished his shower.

“Next to the bed,” I replied, only looking up when he exited the bathroom and immediately slamming my gaze back to my tablet. He was wearing nothing but a towel, and not a very secured towel either. I tried not to think about the trail of hair that graced his abdomen, leading down, down, down...

“You can look, if you want,” he said, an evil glee in his voice as I heard him drop his towel. “Not like most women haven't seen this already.” My face went from just burning to a raging volcano of lava. The fallout between him and Leighla was notorious, his nude pictures were posted in revenge when she found out he was cheating on her with Zahra, his current girlfriend. I was one of the few who hadn't seen them. Rather than being thrilled at the possibility of knowing what he looked like naked, I had felt ashamed and had refused to look at them. I had been curious, of course, but my shame had outweighed it.

“Thanks, but no thanks. I would rather you get dressed and eat already. I've been rearranging your schedule and--” The bastard... he walked over to me and sat down on the bed, the takeout box of breakfast in one hand, and ate while I tried to form words. Naked. So. Very. Naked.

“You were saying?” he asked. Gleeful. Evil. Ugh.
“What?” Had I been saying something? All I could focus on was the fact that Seth was completely naked, not even a foot away from me, and the corner of my tablet was suddenly very interesting as I refused to look at him. Had it always had that scratch on it?

“You're rearranging my schedule?”

“Oh. Right. I, um, moved some things around… canceled a few others… will you please at least put the towel back on??” I was staring out the window, refusing to look in his direction.

"Do you look away when Roman or Dean get naked in your presence?” I could hear his stupid perfect smirk get wider.

"One, that doesn't happen often. Two, it's not that big a deal because they're my brothers, but yes, I do. Three, put something on before I call up Dean and ask him to save me from the naked man in my room."

"Spoilsport." He laughed but went back to getting dressed. “So what are you cutting out of my schedule?” I breathed a little easier once his pants were on.

“A few promotional meets, combining some interviews, just trying to get you more time.”

“More time?” He was fully dressed. "Why?’"

“Uh, how about because you nearly collapsed last night? I assume you've been running yourself ragged, Rollins, and you should have told me. I would have done something sooner." I sighed heavily. "You need a break, but Hunter… He told me that wouldn’t be happening. So the best I can do is ease the pressure on you. How much have you been sleeping lately?” The dark circles under his eyes were lessened, but still present.

“I don’t know...like three or four hours a night? If that.”

“Rollins!” I couldn’t believe it. “Why didn’t you tell me??”

He shrugged. “I just need to get used to it. No big deal.”

I walked up to him and grasped his face in my hands. “Seth, no. You cannot get used to something like that. You need your sleep, you need your rest. I know you don't normally get a lot, but you definitely need more than that. I can’t stop you from going full steam, but please, you have to be safe about it.”

He stared at me in slight shock. “Dollface…”

I huffed and smacked his face a little, letting him go as I turned to grab my things. “Don’t call me dollface. Let’s get ready to go. I cleared up your schedule enough for you to have a decent workout this morning. You have some promotions I can’t get you out of, but I can guarantee you a better hour to go to bed.” I bit my lip on the next part. "I think it would be best if we stopped sparring together. You have better things to concentrate on--"

"Fuck no! Those are some seriously awesome workouts. We're keeping them and that's final. I guess… I can cut out the extra workout I do on those days,” he said.

"Jeez… I didn't even know you were doing extra workouts… Ok, fine. We'll keep those. And I'm taking over your recovery regime. You will fill me in on everything you do. I will monitor it like a hawk and I'll even throw in massages on a daily basis while we're on the road. No arguments, got it? And don't tell anyone about that part. Dean and… Dean will kill me if he finds out.” He
wouldn’t, but he would be very upset.

He came up behind me and hugged me tightly. “I won’t tell Dean or Roman. You’re the best.”

I smiled, a soft smile Seth couldn’t see. “Only because you’re the worst.” He laughed at that.
“So what do you think?” I asked Richard, pulling him along by his hand. He was in town to see his cousin, and since she lived in the same town Raw was being held in, he was currently visiting me at work. I was incredibly nervous. If I was being honest, it felt a little rushed, since we had only been dating since just after SummerSlam. Sort of. Life on the road is hectic. We had been out on several dates, and had agreed to be exclusive to each other, but it felt strange. Now he was visiting me at work and it was really weirding me out. I felt nervous and jittery, and I was trying so hard to hide it. Lucky for me, Richard was an easygoing guy and had the ability to get me to relax somewhat. Roman and Dean, and even Seth actually, were better at it, but Richard was doing an adequate job.

“It’s nice,” he said, turning around to view the entire arena. The crowd hadn't been let in yet, so this was a rare sight for someone outside the company. “So… do you wrestle too?”

I laughed and hopped up to sit on the ring. Richard took my hand in his. “No, though I do train with some of the women. If I absolutely had to get in the ring, I’d probably not make a fool of myself. I mostly just manage the champion and try to make sure he stays out of trouble. Very heavy emphasis on try. It’s a difficult job, as I’ve mentioned before. He’s very troublesome.”

“That’s a weird pronunciation of awesome,” Seth said from behind us. I turned and raised an eyebrow at him. “Oh, or maybe you meant handsome, because I am certainly that as well.”

“And so modest,” I said dryly. “Rich, this is my client, Seth Rollins. Rollins, this is Richard Prince, my… my boyfriend.” I suddenly felt extremely nervous. In all the time I had know Roman, Dean, and Seth, I had never had a boyfriend. I liked to say it was because I had been too busy, but Renee would say it was because I was in love with Seth. I tried not to think about that too much, especially after last week and his nakedness, which was actually part of why I had gotten Richard tickets to tonight's show. My guilt, despite the fact that nothing had happened or would have happened even if Richard or Zahra weren't in the picture, had me saying yes to Richard's request. I still blushed remembering parts of that morning. It was almost enough to make me drop Richard's hand. Almost.

“Boyfriend? I wasn’t aware you were dating seriously…” Seth said, giving Richard a hard look, his gaze trailing down to our joined hands. Rich smiled and offered his other hand.

“Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Rollins,” Rich said as Seth gripped Rich’s hand. There was a slight tug of war between the two, and I think Seth triumphed, but there was a definite tension in the air. “She speaks of you. Often.”

“Oh ho ho, does she now?” Seth was grinning at me. I scowled at him.

“Yes, well, Rich is nice enough to let me vent about work, and you are definitely something I need to vent about,” I said through gritted teeth. "Anyway, I was just showing him around backstage, and now the ring. He’s in town visiting family, and decided to come visit me as well. He’ll be sitting ringside, front row, with his cousin, who is a fan of wrestling.” I hadn't met Rich's cousin before they arrived at the arena, but he had assured me that she was an avid viewer of WWE and was excited to be here. She was part of a backstage VIP tour with an official WWE representative at the moment, having the time of her life.
"Oh, she cute?"

I glared at him, but Rich laughed. "She is. She's also more interested in seeing the women's matches than the men's," he said pointedly.

"Ah, well…" Seth shrugged. He stared at Richard for a moment. "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

I sighed. "I somehow doubt it--"

Seth smacked his hands together, his face lighting up. "You're the Chinese delivery guy!"

"I'm sorry, the what…?" I said. "He doesn't work for a Chinese restaurant."

"Then why did he deliver our food to your apartment? The night we were going over tapes to prepare for Night of Champions."

I had no idea what was going on, but I knew Seth wouldn't lie about something like that. There was no reason, and it was easy enough to find out. I turned to Richard, who was looking sheepish.

"Darn, I was hoping you wouldn't recognize me…" he said.

"I'm sorry… WHAT?!"

"Told you." Smug asshole.

"Shut up, Rollins," I said. "Richard. Please explain yourself."

"I wanted to surprise you. I know you said you were doing work stuff, but I hadn't seen you in a week, and I was outside your apartment when I texted you, saw the guy with the Chinese food… I paid for the food, and took it up to your place to surprise you, but then… this guy answered the door. I was shocked, so I just played it off. He paid me back for the food, and I saw you the next day. You ended up telling me about him and the work you two did, but I couldn't admit that I was there. It was too embarrassing."

I really didn't know what to say to all that. It was really weird.

"Hey, we've got to get going, but I hope you have fun, Rich." Seth snapped his fingers at one of the stagehands. "You! Take Mr. Prince to his seat."

I tried to stop him. "But--"

"And get him some snacks, my treat," Seth said, interrupting me. "Anything he wants. Dollface, I need you to come with me."

I tried to protest, but Rich was already walking away with the stagehand and Seth was pulling me along in a no-objections-allowed manner. "Hey! Why did you pull me away? We have plenty of time before the show starts." We were alone in his private locker room, the air between us was heavy. I've never been afraid of Seth, but I was definitely nervous.

His back was to me. The physical tension in his stance made me hesitate getting closer to him, made me unsure of what to expect from him.

"Kane," he said, breaking the silence.

"I'm sorry?"
The tension left his body and he turned around. "Kane. He's lurking around. He... He might go after you. To get to me. I'm sure your prince would try, but he can't protect you the way I can."

"Well, he's in training to be a religious speaker, not a wrestler, so I wouldn't expect him to," I said with a smile. "I really don't think Kane will come after me. I mean, we're friends, and even if he did, I can take care of myself, you know."

"I know. But..."

The sentence was left hanging. "But what?"

He shook his head. "But I don't trust Kane. Plus, Roman and Dean would make my life hell if anything happened to you. Can't have that."

"I'm not sure if that's completely true anymore... I mean, Dean, sure, but... Roman still isn't... he's..." I trailed off. He never even looked at me anymore, whereas before, he'd at least glance at me to check on me. Renee told me that he didn't ask about me anymore either.

Seth raised an eyebrow. "Roman will forgive you."

I wished I had his confidence, but I felt like he was also trying to distract me from something else.

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We stood at the door of the Authority's office for a solid minute. "What are we doing here?" I asked in annoyance. "Aren't we going in?"

"Shhhh! I'm trying to listen," Seth hissed at me. His ear was pressed against the door. I looked around the hallway, bored, until he said, "Ok, come on!"

Swinging the door open, he walked in. I was only a step behind him, and I was surprised to see not only Hunter, Stephanie and Kane, but a fourth person. A pretty blonde, who was shaking Kane's hand.

"This is outrageous!" Seth said. Since I hadn't been eavesdropping like him, I had no idea what he was referring to. "I cannot believe this! How could someone do this to you, Kane? Report you in an anonymous email? Anonymous! They couldn't even put their own name on it. Just a disgrace."

"I'm sorry, what?" I asked. "Someone reported you, Kane?"

Kane gave Seth a sideways look, and then answered me, "Seems so. For creating an unsafe work environment."

With the way Seth was protesting the unfairness of the report, I could only assume that it was him who sent that complaint in.

"Ashley here," he gestured to the blonde woman, "is from Human Resources and will be evaluating me this evening. Ashley, allow me to introduce Seth Rollins, our WWE World Heavyweight Champion, and his manager, my colleague."

I shook hands with Ashley. She seemed very nice. "Pleasure to meet you."

"You as well. You've worked with Mr. Kane long?" she asked.

"Since April of this year, but we've known of each other a lot longer," I replied. "Rollins has worked with him since... June of last year, I believe." I cast my eyes down. "I'm not entirely certain
to be honest. I wasn't active with the company at the time."

"Yes, well," Stephanie said, "Ashley can speak to you later, get your honest opinion on Kane." She turned to Kane. "Kane, this is very serious. Ashley's evaluation tonight could determine your future with the company, or your dismissal."

"Of course, I understand. I will take this evaluation seriously, because I take my job as director very seriously."

Seth pulled me back and stepped closer to Kane. "Wow. I cannot believe this. That sounds like a lot of pressure."

Kane growled and squared off with Seth. Ashley, Stephanie and Hunter couldn't see the face he was making to Seth, but I'm sure they could hear his darkened tone. "Don't worry, Seth. I can handle it. Don't forget… I am the man…" He raised his World's Best Director of Operations mug and took a sip from it. His expression changed to a much friendlier one, and his tone was lighter as well. "Who has taken an extensive conflict resolution training course. I look forward to proving my worth to the company. Come on, Ashley," he offered her his hand, which she took, and lead her out of the room. "Have you met the Bellas yet? I love their tv show on E! Network, Total Divas…" His voice got quieter as they walked away.

"Well…" I said. "Tonight's going to be interesting."

"Did you see that? Did you see what I mean about Kane?" Seth asked Hunter and Stephanie. They both looked baffled. "I'm going to keep an eye on him." Seth walked out, following Kane and Ashley.

"And I'll keep an eye on Rollins. As usual." I bid Hunter and Stephanie goodbye and ran after Seth.

"I know you sent that email."

"What? Me? No! Who said it was an email?" Seth said, peeking around the corner to watch Kane and Ashley talk to some of the wrestlers and staff.

"You did. And then Kane looked at you in a way that suggested you shouldn't have known it was an email." I sighed. "Look, I know you think he's out to get you or something, but this is not the way to handle it, even if he was. At the most, I think he's just getting a little revenge on you. He's messing with you, like I do, but in his own way."

"He is out to get me. Why can't you understand that? And he'll get you too in the crossfire if I'm not careful. So I need to take him out one way or another. This way, it's all sanctioned by the company, and I don't have to get my hands dirty. Aren't you proud of me for that?"

I rolled my eyes. "This is still a dirty tactic. Maybe if you were just a little nicer to Kane, he wouldn't be so hard on you. I mean, look at me. He has every right to hate me since I'm your manager, but he doesn't. He likes me. We're friends. He's on my Christmas card list now. Granted, it's pretty short to begin with, but--"

"Am I on that list?"

"You're about to be on Santa's naughty list if you don't stop whatever it is that you're doing," I growled.
"Oh! He's leaving. Now's my chance." Seth ran over to Ashley, who was now standing alone. I followed, wishing I had some popcorn to eat while this fiasco happened. "Heeeeyyyy, Ashley. Got a moment?"

She looked up and smiled patiently. "Sure, what can I do for you?"

"I just wanted to give my input on Kane. Since you seem to be talking to everyone." Seth smiled brightly, but Ashley's expression stayed the same. At least one woman was able to see through Seth's charms.

"I'll be happy to listen to you, but first," she turned to me. "What are your thoughts on Mr. Kane?"

I blinked in surprise. "Oh, yeah, sure. Well, first, I have to tell you that he is my friend, but we became friendly because of work. He's always watched out for me, is a good listener, and really does love his job, even when he has… difficult coworkers." I glanced at Seth, who was impatiently waiting to speak. "He does the best he can with the people he works with."

Ashley smiled warmly and wrote down some notes. "And Mr. Rollins, what--"

"He is a vindictive jerk who only came back to work to make my life miserable."

I smacked my forehead and dragged my palm across my face. "For the love of… he's not out to get you, Rollins. Mess with you, sure. We all do that. But he's not trying to actually destroy you."

"He is! He is a two-faced demon, and I mean that literally. He has his first face, which is the one you see now, and then he has his second face, which is blood red and breathes fire--"

"He does not breathe fire," I corrected. "He can conjure it though, which is interesting."

"Oh, like a magician? I like magicians," Ashley said. There was a slight sparkle in her eye that I found curious.

"Sort of?" I answered.

"Look, whatever he is, does not change the fact that he is out to get me. And that there is just something wrong with… KANE!" Seth's voice changed from serious to jovial so suddenly, I thought he had lost his mind, but then realized Kane was standing on the other side of me, holding a large red gift box. "Buddy… what are… what are you doing here? I thought you had to go take care of some things?" Ashley was watching Seth closely and scribbling notes down.

"Hey guys! What are you talking about?"

Ashley spoke first. "Well, he was just--"

"Just telling Ashley here about you and me, buddy!" Seth interrupted. I sighed and shook my head. Kane had a knowing smile on his face, so I didn't see the need to interject. "About how far back we go!"

"Ah, yes," Kane said fondly. "We've had such fun times! You've taken a magical journey here at WWE, and I was a witness for so much of it. When you won your Money In The Bank contract, when you burned Suplex City to the ground." Kane looked down at the box in his hands. "I'm just so proud of you, Seth. And… well, I guess this will say it better than words ever could. Here, pal." He handed Seth the box.

"Uh… what is… what is this?" He stared down at the box like it was going to bite him. "What's in
"Open it!" Kane said enthusiastically.

"Kane. What's in the box?!” Seth said, fear in his voice.

Kane smiled softly. "Open it."

Seth continued to stare at the box in fear, so I shook my head and lifted the lid off of it. Something golden peeked out. "What in the world…” I said, and reached in.

"No! Don't!" Seth shouted, but I ignored him and lifted out his head. To clarify, it was a bronzed head of Seth. At first, I thought it was a bust that Kane had commissioned, but the neck was too jagged.

"It's your severed head!" Kane said, smiling brightly.

"Wait a minute, is this…" I looked up at Kane. "Is this from the statue that Sting trashed??" I was amazed that he had found it at all. I had tried going after it, unbeknownst to Seth, but the landfill it had ended up in was too extensive. I had given up and called it a loss.

"Yep!"

Seth was looking more and more horrified by the moment. "Where did you even get this?!"

"I went to the landfill and dug it up. Took me both of my off days, but it was worth it to see the look of gratitude on your face."

I stifled a laugh, because there was just sheer terror on Seth's face. "Kane, that was extremely thoughtful of you to do," I said. "I tried to find it as well, so I know you must have put a lot of effort into this. Rollins is speechless, so I'll say it in his place. Thank you."

"Oh! How considerate of you, Kane!" Ashley exclaimed. I nodded in agreement, enjoying Seth's complete and utter confusion.

"C-considerate?" he asked, looking from Ashley to Kane. "No, no nononononono, this is… this is too much, Kane! I can't keep this… I gotta go…” Seth shoved the head back at Kane and ran off.

Kane frowned, looking thoughtful. Then held the head up next to his own. "Well, you know what they say, two head are better than one!" Ashley and I both giggled. "I really thought he would like it."

"Ah, you know Rollins, he's fickle. I'll keep it for now," I said, taking the head from Kane. "I'm sure, in a day or two, he'll be happy to have at least part of his statue back." I waved at the two of them, careful to not drop the head, and went off to Seth's locker room to stow the head with my things. If nothing else, it would be a great prop for pranks later on.

**********

Seth disappeared for a while. It wasn't that unusual, but with Ashley's presence and the fact that Richard was in attendance to witness all of these shenanigans, I was worried. As much as I complained about Seth, I didn't want Richard thinking I couldn't handle my responsibilities. Plus this thing with Roman didn't reflect well on me or my job. Richard had started dropping hints that I should get a job closer to home and quit traveling with the company.
"Hey, girlie," Renee said, popping up out of nowhere. "Why the long face? Oh... wait... you heard about Roman, didn't you?"


"Oh, uh, nothing. Nothing. So what's got you all worried?"

"No no no, you said something about Roman, now tell me, Rini," I demanded. Renee pouted, then looked around to see who might be watching us.

"Ok, fine, but you didn't hear it from me. You know Roman has a match tonight, right?"

"Yeah, main event with Bray."

Renee nodded. "Well, he told Dean that he was going to end it. This feud he has with Bray. Dean thinks this is a bad idea because the Family is going to be ringside, but Dean isn't."

"He what?!"

Renee smacked me on my shoulder lightly. "Shhhh! Yeah, Roman told him to stay backstage, but Dean said that if the Family starts anything, he'll come running like a bat out of hell. Roman couldn't argue with that, but then he suggested recruiting Randy Orton. Dean didn't like that."

"Hmph. I don't either, but Randy could prove useful. They have a common enemy."

Renee nodded. "Yeah, that's what Roman said. Dean just doesn't like Randy. Called him an outsider. Said he'd rather have his little sister cover his back than a snake."

That melted my heart a little and I smiled softly at that. "He did? Really?"

Renee nodded, also smiling, but then the smile fell. "Roman... Roman didn't appreciate Dean saying that. Told him to leave you out of this, to leave you to their 'little brother', to Seth."

It was like a cold splash of water. "Oh..."

"Yeah, sorry."

I shook my head. "It's ok. Go on."

Renee took a breath. "Well, not much else to say. Dean's got Roman's back. Randy may help, if he feels like it, since he took offense to Dean calling him an outsider, but he told Roman that no matter what, after tonight, Bray Wyatt is fair game to anyone."

"Fuck..." I said. I wanted to help, but even if Roman was currently talking to me, I had no idea what I could do.

**********

I was sitting in gorilla, watching the monitors there, as Ashley and Kane went out to the ring to give a formal presentation of Kane's evaluation. I wasn't that worried, to be honest. Ashley seemed like the fair sort, and had talked to a lot of people throughout the night. As odd as Kane had been acting, I didn't see him losing his job over Seth's "anonymous" complaint.

"Ashley, I am ready to get to the bottom of this anonymous complaint against me. Your decision is final, and I will comply with whatever you have to say," Kane said. Ashley beamed at him, and opened her portfolio, where she had written up the report.
Before she could say a word, Seth stormed by me, calling for his music to play.

"Son of a…" I said, running after him. "Rollins! Get back here!" He ignored me, of course.

As we got to the stage at the top of the ramp, he said into his microphone. "Hold on, don't you dare read a thing in that biased, one sided report." Ashley looked incredibly annoyed.

"Rollins!" I hissed, grabbing at his sleeve. "This is a Bad Idea. Capital letters!!" He shook me off. "Damn it, Rollins! Will you listen to me for once?!"

"Quiet, dollface. I have to say this. Look, Ashley, you think Kane is this nice, mild mannered fellow, but he is not. I have to show this to you. Please. Just watch." He pointed up to the screen above us. Everyone looked up.

It was a video package of Demon Kane. All clips from the past. I have to admit, it was well put together, but it didn't seem to prove any points. "Gold star for effort, I guess," I told Seth.

"This proves everything!" he shouted into the mic.

"It proves nothing! Ashley doesn't know Demon Kane, and it's Corporate Kane that's currently in the ring with her."

"They're the same person!"

"You can't prove that with that!" I said, pointing up to the screen that now showed the Raw logo. "You know what I mean! Rollins, you are losing it."

"No, no no no no! Kane is a monster! Just last week, he tried to drag us to hell! Right there, in that ring." He pointed to the ring Ashley and Kane were standing in. "Me and her," he said pointing to me. "But guess what, Kane. People like me, we don't go to hell! And guess what else?!"

I covered my face with my hands. "Oh, dear lord, Rollins, stop talking! You're just making a fool of yourself." I glanced over to Richard, who was trying to cover his laughter and failing miserably. Everyone else seemed to be enjoying Seth's descent into madness and were openly laughing.

"I'm destined for heaven."

I tried to wrestle the microphone away from him, but he held onto my shoulder and kept me at a distance, preventing me from reaching the damn device. Everyone was laughing now. I pulled out of his grasp and let him continue to make a fool of himself.

"That's right! Heaven! Just last week, the Pope was in town, and I had an audience with him." He had done no such thing. "And the Pope, he said to me, 'Seth Rollins, you are going to heaven.' So there you have it."

"You're an atheist," I hissed at him. "Don't go spouting off about stuff you don't even believe in!"

Seth made a face at me and lowered the microphone. "I'm trying to make a point here!"

"Is the point that you're an idiot?! Because that's what's coming across!!" I yelled at him.

"Ah, Ashley, don't mind Seth," Kane said. "He's just very passionate about his job, much like myself. I mean, take a look." Kane gestured up to the screen.

It was another video package, this one about Seth. And it did not paint him in a good light. It was every mean thing he had said or done to Kane in the time that I had been working with them, which
was a lot. Did you ever watch that episode of The Office, when Jim's list of pranks on Dwight are read back to him, and Jim gets a reality check on the things he's been doing over the years? It was kind of like that, but more malicious and I don't think Seth was bothered by it at all, unlike Jim.

"See? So, if you would be so kind, please read your report," Kane said, smiling broadly.

Ashley cleared her throat. "After conducting a thorough investigation, I have come to the conclusion that Mr. Kane is sound of mind, and is more than capable of fulfilling his obligations as Director of Operations."

"What?! This is bullshit!!" Seth screamed.

"Damn it, Rollins, this is a PG show!!" I said, elbowing him hard.

Ashley continued. "Mr. Kane is kind, helpful, hardworking, thoughtful, extremely considerate of his coworkers, and goes out of his way to make sure everyone is comfortable working here. A far cry from the complaint, Mr. Kane is quite possibly the perfect employee of WWE."

"Are you kidding me?!" Seth screamed "Do you even know how to do your job?!"

"Rollins!" I elbowed him again.

Ashley turned a cold eye to Seth. "If anyone needs to be evaluated, Mr. Rollins, it's you."

"What?!"

I laughed. "Oh my god… This just got good. Please continue, Ashley."

"Shut up, dollface." I did not, and laughed harder.

Ashley went on. "Seth Rollins is rude, cruel, petty, narcissistic, and paranoid." Seth's jaw dropped open. It was everything I had been telling him, but coming from Ashley, I think it carried more weight. "You are the single most unprofessional person I have ever met in my time with WWE."

"She's not wrong," I said. "I've told you to be nicer to people. But did you listen?"

"No. No no no no no no."

"No. No no no no no no." He started walking towards the ring. I was quick to follow him. "This is a travesty of justice! I am the WWE Champion!"

As he got into the ring, Ashley got out. I didn't blame her. She didn't need to be here anymore, and it was likely going to come down to a physical confrontation at this point. I helped her down the steps, but didn't follow Seth into the ring, though I stayed next to the apron, just in case.

"I am the World Heavyweight Champion! The Champion of the WORLD!" He shoved his title into Kane's chest with each word, said slowly and deliberately. However, I don't think dropping the title was part of that deliberate delivery. Seth looked nervously down at the title, then at Kane.

"Just pick it up already, Rollins," I said. This had been amusing for a moment, but now I was starting to get a Bad Feeling. "Pick it up, and let's go. Kane's not leaving, you don't have a match tonight, and now I'm just annoyed in general."

Kane looked down at the title, smiled at Seth, and went to pick it up. I expected Seth to back up a bit more, maybe even leave the ring, when Kane stepped forward and bent down to pick up the title. I did not expect Seth to kick Kane in the stomach, and apply the Pedigree to him.

"Kane!!" I screamed, scrambling into the ring. Seth was screaming at Kane about being the
champion while he writhed on the mat. I shoved Seth away to check on Kane. "Oh my god, Kane, talk to me!"

"Ugh… I was… I just…"

"It's ok. It's fine. He just Pedigreed you. It was unexpected, but you'll be ok. Just take a moment to get your bearings. Ok?" I held his hand to help him up. "Ready?"

"Yeah…"

I hadn't been paying attention to Seth. I didn't see where he grabbed the chair from, but suddenly he was next to me, the folded steel chair aimed right at Kane's thigh. The *twang* of the metal reverberated in my ears as he hit Kane once, and then again. I fell to the mat in shock. Kane was screaming in pain, but I couldn't move. *A chair. Seth hit him… with a chair…* I wasn't in the ring anymore. Not this ring. I was back in *that* ring, and Roman and Dean were the ones writhing in agony as Seth hit them over… and over… and over…

*Stop… please… stop… STOP!!!*

I was shoving Seth into the corner of the ring, but I was too late. He had wrapped the steel chair around Kane's leg, the recently recovered one, and had jumped on it. "Get out!!" I screamed at him. "Get out of this ring!!"

Seth was laughing. *Laughing.* "How's it feel, Kane? Huh?? HOW'S IT FEEL?!!"

"Shut up, Seth!!" I screamed, and then slapped him. He looked at me in shock, a red handprint blossoming on his face. "Shut up for once in your life!!" I let go of him.

"Dollface… you're crying…"

I hadn't noticed. I wiped the tears away furiously and grabbed the microphone out of his hand. "Medics!! I need medics here right now!!" I yelled into it before tossing the microphone aside and going back to Kane.

"Oh, god… I think it's broken again…" he cried. "It hurts… it hurts so much…"

"I don't think it's broken," I said, looking down at it. "It's going to be ok, Kane. Listen to me. I'm here, ok? I'm right here with you," I said as soothingly as I could. The med team was running down the ramp with a stretcher. "The medics are here, ok? They're going to help you. You're going to be alright, I promise." I looked over at Seth, glaring at him as he watched me in silence. "I'm so sorry, Kane. I should have stopped him sooner. I'm so very sorry."

"Not your fault…" Kane said, grimacing. He was holding his leg. From what I could tell, it didn't look broken, but was probably very badly bruised. "He's like a force of nature."

"Yeah… but so are you. Big Red Machine, right? The Devil's Favorite Demon. You certainly have the physical strength to get through this."

"Yeah…” He grimaced and groaned a bit.

Seth had recovered from his shock and gotten a hold of the microphone again. "Oh… what's-a-matter, Kane? Did you get a little boo boo? You're looking very human to me." He cackled at his own joke. "Who do you think you are? Because you're sure as hell no demon, are you?"

I got up and out of the way of the medical team. And turned straight on Seth. "Are you done?"
"I'm just getting started, doll--" I slapped him again.

"Shut up, Rollins! Just shut up! I told you not to call me that!" I could feel Richard's eyes on me. I quieted my voice. I was still incredibly angry at Seth. "Look, you've done your damage. Just… just leave the arena already."

Seth looked behind me, into the crowd, and then over at Kane. "So that's how it is?" he snarled. "Some new person comes in, and suddenly, I'm the embarrassment you can't stand to be seen with??"

"What? No, that's not--"

"Well, I don't need to leave the arena!! Everything I've been saying, everything I've been trying to prove, it's right here!!" He pointed down at Kane. "He thought he could fool you. He thought he could fool the Authority, the WWE Universe!! But not me! He could never fool me!! And now everyone knows that Kane is a fraud!!"

I ignored Seth and concentrated on Kane. The medics had him strapped to the stretcher and were wheeling him up the ramp and out of the stage area.

"Your days of being jealous of The Man are over!!" Seth screamed. He held his title up high in the air. The video screen above the ramp showed Kane being lifted into an ambulance and driven away. "This just shows… if anyone wants to step to me, they had better bring a goddamn army!!"

That was it. I had had it. I shoved him as hard as I could. "What the hell is wrong with you??" I yelled at Seth. I hated that the Raw crowd was witnessing our argument, that Richard was a witness to it, but I was just so angry. "Seriously! He has been trying to help you!"

"Are you as blind as the rest of them! He's not on my side, dollface! He's out to get me!"

"Oh my g-- You are so paranoid! Why can't you just trust me?"

"You can't be trusted right now! You're in denial! Or you're under his spell! I think you might even be helping him!"

That was it. "I haven't but damn it I wish I had. You know what? I'm calling him out."

Seth looked at me in confusion. "What?"

I pulled out the coin Kane had given me and raised it high above my head. "I summon thee, Demon Kane!"

Seth took a step back. "What the hell is that?? What are you doing??" he asked pointing at the coin. Neither one of us were really paying attention to the monitor. Renee told me later what happened. The ambulance came to a screeching halt.

"Come forth, Kane!" I yelled. Seth took another step back. Smoke billowed out from the back doors of the ambulance. "Come forth, Demon! Your ally calls you!"

"So you admit you're in cahoots with him! I knew it!" Seth screamed at me, taking a few steps towards me.

The back doors of the ambulance opened and Demon Kane stepped out, though Seth and I were arguing too much to notice.
"I wasn't before, but I am now! Why are you being so mean to him? He's been a little weird about it, but he's actually been thinking about how to help you! I'm proud to help him and call him my friend!"

"Why are you never on my side when it comes to him! He's psychotic! He is out to get me and you're just ready to hand me over to him--"

**BOOM!**

Fire erupted from the corner posts, making me jump nearly a mile. Seth's arms went around me protectively as the entire arena was bathed in blood red light and Kane’s music played. He appeared at the ramp entrance, his leg no longer affected by Seth's earlier attack. He headed down to the ring.

"On, crap, it actually worked…” I muttered. Seth let go of me and pinched my arm. “Ow!”

"What the hell is wrong with you?!" he asked, echoing my words to him.

"Ok, one, I'm just as surprised as you are, and two, you were pissing me off!!"

Seth picked up the steel chair again. "Get behind me and get out of the ring!" he shouted. I obedied, unsure of what was going to happen, and retreated to the announce table.

Kane didn't even look at me. He stepped into the ring with one giant step. Seth went after the same leg, but it had no affect. It simply bounced off of Kane like a ball off a concrete wall. "Oh, shit…” I muttered.

It didn't get any better. Kane took the chair away from Seth far easier than I expected and choke slammed him into the mat. When Seth got up, Kane tried to Tombstone Piledrive him, but Seth escaped and ran away. If I wasn't so sure that Kane wasn't going to hurt me, I would have been much more upset about him abandoning me again. I was upset, however, when Kane picked up the championship title and held it aloft to the cheers of the crowd, but not the same way I was upset at Seth.

*I'm sorry, Kane. But you won't be getting that anytime soon,* I thought.

**********

I left before Roman's match with Bray. Seth insisted, and I was just too tired to argue. I heard about it later from Renee.

The match ended in a double countout. And then the fight continued into the audience. Both Bray and Roman beat the hell out of each other. Bray drove Roman into the timekeeper's area, and then stood on the announce table in victory. Roman then Speared him like a hound of hell, right into the Spanish announce table.

It took me a while before being able to respond to Renee, but she assured me that Roman was able to walk out of the arena, though he had had some help from Dean.

**********


"Whoa… easy there," I heard behind me. I didn't have to turn around to know it was Kane. We
were in the hotel gym, which was surprisingly well stocked with equipment. It was early. Breakfast hadn't been available yet when I came down from my room. I had woken up angry, having dreamt of last night's events on Raw. I wanted to get rid of the negative energy before I caught a flight home for my days off.

"Like hell I will," I growled and continued to kick the heavy bag in front of me. I was getting really good at the rapid kicks, but it was time to switch to punches and jabs. Kane limped to the other side to hold the bag in place. He was using crutches to move around, but was able to lean on the bag for support. Even through his pants leg, I could tell his calf was swollen. "I'm sorry, but I need this." Whack. Whack. Whack.

"I get it," he said. "Seth has been… a lot more trouble than I remember."

Whack. Whack. Whack. "You have no idea," I muttered. Whack. Whack. "Besides the fact that Richard saw all of that…" I shook my head and hit the bag harder. He had had some things to say about my demon friend, things I didn't want to repeat to Kane. Fortunately, he had been expected to stay with his cousin, and wasn't with me in the hotel to witness my frustration. "Lately, dealing with Rollins is like dealing with spoiled child who keeps trying to insist that things have always been this way, when you know they haven't." Whack. "Delusional!" Whack. "Stupid!" Whack. "Jackhole!"

"Are you calling him a jackal? Like, the wild dog?" Kane asked, confused.


"Oh, clever."

"Yeah, I heard it somewhere, and I just liked it." I paused mid-punch. "Ugh, all of this lately… it's like when I first started working with him again. I thought he had gotten better since then, that he was no longer so… aggravating. I guess I was wrong." I looked over at Kane before continuing. "Looks like I was wrong about you as well."

"Not completely," he said. "I am… How should I say this… taking my mask away, taking the Demon away… it didn't go very well. He was never gone from me, just… buried deep down. Now… am I enjoying Seth's torment? Yes. But I am not that man in the red mask, even if he is helping Seth."

"Do you really believe that?" I asked.

"In the long run, anything that doesn't kill us just makes us stronger. So, if Seth survives this torment, then it would make him stronger, right? Therefore, it's helping him."

I sighed. "Kane… that's not what…” I sighed a second time. If he didn't want to tell me, no amount of questioning was going to get it out of him. "Look, I can't stop you from this whole thing. I can't help you, I won't help you destroy Seth. Just… Be careful, ok? Rollins is not someone you want to goad into an all out war."

Kane smiled patiently. "Neither am I. So let me warn you, don't be noble and try to sacrifice yourself for Seth. He's not worth it, and while the Demon won't hurt you, he won't try to save you either. Oh, and I got the rematch for Seth versus John for the United States Championship approved for the Madison Square Garden pay-per-view," he said. "Tell Seth I said good luck. Oh, and wish me luck as well. Ashley asked me to get drinks with her later. Not sure what other business she has to discuss but I look forward to it."
I raised my eyebrows, remembering the way Ashley had been looking at Kane. "Kane, uh… I don't think she wants to discuss business."

"Oh… what do you think she wants to talk about then?"

I couldn't stifle my laughter. This was a nice distraction from the tension between him and Seth. "Kane… just… bring some flowers to her. And make sure you compliment her."

"Isn't that unprofessional?"

I shook my head. "Nope. It's very appropriate for a date."

"A date? This isn't… wait… is it?"

I smiled. "You'll be fine. Have fun!"

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - October 1, 2015

Seth was in a mood when we got to the arena for Smackdown. He didn't even cheer up when I told him about his rematch. He went out to the ring at the beginning of the show, demanding that Kane come out to the ring and admit the Corporate persona was just for show.

"I'm just going to sit in the corner and wait for all of this to be over with," I told him.

It took a while, and a few more jabs from Seth, for Kane to come out. His limp was just as bad as I remembered from Tuesday morning.

"You know, Seth, I was actually really happy to return to my job as Director of Operations. So happy that I even went as far as to ignore your paranoid delusions, your tendency to be a spoiled brat, all with a smile on my face. But after you put my recovering leg in a steel chair and then stomped on it, well… let's just say that I'm not happy anymore. The passion I held for my job, for this company, it's been replaced."

"Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold on a second!" Seth exclaimed. "Are you trying to pin this on me? Make me the bad guy?!"

"He has a point," I chimed in from where I sat on the rope corner. "He didn't instigate anything. You did."

"That's bullshit!"

"Rollins! Language!" I hissed. Seth growled. "He was the one who started this! He is the one who attacked me at Night of Champions! He is the one who dragged us both to hell!!"

"Because of you," I shouted at him, getting up. "You brought this on yourself, and you have to live with the consequences of your actions. You were the one who attacked him right after Brock broke his ankle! You were the one the Demon--"

"Oh, oh, oh! That's right! It wasn't the guy in a suit that did all that horrible stuff! It was the guy in the red mask! A completely different person! Come on! It's obvious that they're the same guy!" He turned back to Kane and pointed at the audience. "Everyone saw you go into the ambulance, and
everyone saw the Demon come out! You can't say it wasn't you, because it obviously was! I don't know what you're trying to pull, but I can only think of two possible explanations. First, you think I'm stupid enough to believe there's two Kanes." He cackled at that. "But everybody knows I was the brains of the Shield. Therefore, not stupid. So that leaves the second possibility. If you're really trying to pass this off as reality, then that means you've suffered a mental break, and that you require serious psychiatric care."

"You're right, Seth," Kane said quietly. "Psychiatric care is needed, but not for me. For you."

"What?!?!"

Kane continued. "I'm no demon, Seth. I'm the Director of Operations!"

"Stop! Just stop it, Kane! You can not be serious!" Seth sputtered. "Are you trying to tell me that the figure that's been plaguing me for the past few weeks is just a figment of my imagination?!"

"I think you have a great imagination, Seth," Kane said, all smiles again. "Have you ever considered a future as a Hollywood screenwriter?"

The look of shock on Seth's face was priceless. I went as far as taking out my phone and taking a picture of him at that moment. New home screen. Nice.

"Or maybe, Seth..." Kane said, "Maybe you're making this up just to get out of your rematch at Madison Square Garden, the rematch your manager got for you since your previous one with John Cena was interrupted."

Seth glowered at Kane. "You think I'm making this up?!"

Kane smiled his patient smile. "No, Seth. I don't think you're making this up. I am well aware of the Demon that is plaguing WWE," his voice dropped an octave and became more menacing, "and is capable of tearing your body into tiny pieces to spread around the arena."

Seth's eyes went wide, but then he was laughing and pointing at Kane. "See! See! You admit it! You just admitted it! Everyone heard you! You're the Demon!"

"Ehhh," Kane said. "I admit that there is a demon tormenting you. But he is not me. He is not Corporate Kane, as you like to say. However, this demon has turned you into a bit of a negative Nancy, and well, I'm worried. So, I think you need some positivity, and what better way to do that than with the power of positivity themselves, the New Day! You will be tag teaming with them in the main event, against the Dudley Boyz... and the Demon."

"What?!!?!?! No, no, nonononononono! There is no way I'm agreeing to that match!" Seth shouted. Then he went quiet. I could see the wheels in his head turning.

I leaned close to him and asked, "What is it, what are you thinking?"

He lowered the mic. "Dollface, you really believe that Corporate Kane and the Demon aren't the same?"

I lowered my eyes. "I'm not sure what to think anymore, to be honest. But no, I think Kane is trying to... I don't know, trick you? Mess with you?" I shook my head. "I just don't know, but I think he and the Demon are the same."

"Ok, that's what I was thinking, too," he said, then raised the microphone back up. He was smiling again. "I'll agree to the match on one condition. You, Corporate Kane, have to be ringside for the
match. That's the only way I'll agree to it."

Kane considered it for half a moment, and then happily agreed, "Sure! I'd love to be there! Good luck tonight!"

I ended up taking a second picture of Seth. The disbelief on his face was just magnificent. *Man, these looks are both so funny. I'm going to have a hard time choosing one.*

**********

Seth was still annoyed when we ran into New Day backstage. Kofi was clapping their little mantra, but using Seth's name. "Seth. Rol-lins. Seth. Rol-lins. Seth. Rol-lins." Seth grimaced.

"Hey… guys…" I started. "Maybe now's not a good time…"

Kofi scoffed. "It's never not a good time for some positivity. But, Seth, it works a lot better if you clap along."

He grabbed Seth's hands to try to get him to clap, but Seth snatched them back. "I'm not gonna clap! You think clapping will really have any effect on the Demon?! Or will it make everyone see through Kane's farce?! Or hey, will it make you three shut up?! I somehow doubt that."

Big E was not amused, but he grinned and brought a counterargument. "Seth! Will clapping bring joy into your body?!"

"Yep!" all three said.

"Seth," Kofi said, "Will clapping help you reach your goals?"

His face said *I am annoyed and no, it will not.* The New Day ignored that and said, "YEP!"

"Seth," Xavier said, "Will clapping help you find the courage and positivity you need to overcome Corporate Kane and throw him and the Dudleyz out of WWE, thereby solidifying your position in the Authority and making the WWE great again?"

Seth looked confused, and maybe a little hopeful at those words, but was back to annoyed when the New Day shouted "YEP!!" in both of our ears and then giggled at themselves.

"I forgot how loud you three can be," I said, rubbing my ears a little. Seth covered them to muffle their voices. "Thanks," I told him. I could still hear the New Day, however, just less so.

"Seth, there is only one true way to exorcise your Demon!" Big E proclaimed. Now *this* I had to hear.

"Oh, yeah! Exercise!" Kofi said. "You like exercise! Crossfit, kettlebells…"

"Burpees, box jumps," Xavier continued. He wagged his eyebrows at us suggestively. "Get your wad in?"

"Hey, hey, hey!" Seth said, letting go of my ears and standing in front of me protectively. "You stay away from her! It's W.O.D! Get it straight!"

"And it's exORcise, not exERcise," Big E clarified. I moved to Seth's side to see everyone better. Damn his height.

"Oh, right, right, right," Xavier said, nodding. "Double entendre."
I frowned and shook my head. "They're homonyms, not a double entendre."

"I've heard it both ways," Xavier said. Kofi was nodding along.

"Those are two very different things, so I really doubt that," I replied.

"ANYWAYS," Big E interjected. "The way to EXORCISE your Demon is to be positive! Say it with me now, I'm. The MAN! I'm. The MAN!" He was saying it to their mantra and clapping along. I kind of liked where this was going. Especially if it got Seth out of his funk.

Seth was reluctant. "I'm the man…"

"No, no, no, say it from your gut, son!" Kofi said, drumming on his stomach. "From your gut!"

Seth looked at me. "Yeah, come on. From the gut!" I said cheerfully and patted his stomach. "You got those abs. Now use them!"

Seth nodded, a little more confident. "I'm the Man."

"Yeah! Louder!" Big E encouraged.

"I'm the Man!" Seth shouted, getting into it.

"Ok, ok, but now…" Xavier said, and then pressed his lips to his trombone and playing their mantra. *Doot. Doot doot. Doot. Doot doot.*

Seth grinned at me, and kept chanting as he (sort of) danced down the hall, New Day in tow. I walked behind them, enjoying the levity that New Day had brought to Seth. I felt a presence behind me and turned. Kane was standing where we had been just moments before, smiling. He waved. I waved back, but my heart was uneasy.

**********

I saw that Becky and Charlotte had an interview with JoJo, and it was to talk about Paige's recent behavior. I hadn't spoken to Paige since her verbal attack on her teammates. I had tried, mind you, but whenever she saw me, she walked in the other direction. She also ignored my texts and didn't answer my calls. My last message to her said, *I'm here when you're ready to talk.* I couldn't keep putting myself out there and be rejected, but I also wanted to let her know that I would wait for her. It was the best I could do.

I also heard about Roman's confrontation with Bray Wyatt. He threw down a challenge, and Bray accepted it. I shook a little when I saw the details. *A match… at Hell In A Cell… inside the Cell…* It didn't help that Bray's words to Roman were, "I hope you're ready to die."

**********

I was more than a little preoccupied as we walked out to the ring for the tag match. Not even Seth's hilarious annoyance at New Day could make me smile. Well, it made me smile a little, but I still felt uneasy. Kane was already seated next to the announce table, and I wondered how he was going to pull off an appearance by both Corporate and Demon Kane, if at all. After the Dudleyz came out, Demon Kane's music played, and I held my breath. Seth stood, looking at the entrance expectantly, while New Day continued to chant for themselves. When no one came out, we all looked at Corporate Kane, who just shrugged his shoulders and called for the bell to ring.

Once the match was started, I was recording, though I focused more on Seth's involvement, and not
so much on New Day's. Seth was doing better this time around than the last time he teamed with them. At least he was until Kane decided to get up from his chair. Seth was about to do a suicide dive on Devon Dudley, and yelled at Kane to get out of the way. Kane did not listen. I was too far to pull Kane away in time, and Seth crashed into both Devon and Kane, who had to be helped to the back by medical, since he was already hurt and on crutches. Seth panicked at that.

"No, nonononono! He's gotta stay out here!" Seth insisted.

"Rollins, the match!" I reminded him. "You're the legal man right now."

"Yeah, Seth," Kofi chimed in. "You gotta get the Dudleyz."

"Get Devon!" Xavier said, pointing at the man still on the floor outside the ring. "Come on!"

Seth growled, but went back to the match. He threw Devon into the ring, got in, and immediately tagged in Big E.

"Damn it, Rollins!" I yelled as he ran after Kane.

Everyone could hear him yelling. "KANE!! Get back in that chair! You listen to me, you listen to your champion! Get back in that chair!"

Kane turned to look over his shoulder at Seth. And smiled. Not his patient smile. His devious smile. His I'm gonna get you smile. I slunk down to my knees, so that only my eyes and the top of my head were visible behind the apron of the ring. This was not going to end well. I couldn't see Seth's face, but I saw him freeze. He knew. I knew. Anyone looking at Kane knew, he was playing us all. Slowly, he turned and walked back to the ring.

"He's coming out," Seth said to me. He was pale. Scared. "You stay away from him. You got that?"

I nodded and he hugged me tightly. "Good girl. That's my girl," he whispered in my ear. It sent shivers down my spine, and I wished I could protect him from Kane. "Stay safe."

He jumped back into the ring, but Bubba Ray picked him up and slammed him into the mat. Devon got a little revenge for the suicide dive earlier, and sent Seth crashing out of the other side of the ring. Mere moments later, flames erupted from the ramp stage and the Demon made his way down to the ring. Seth scrambled to his feet and attempted to run away, but the Demon caught him and threw him into the barricade not just once but twice. He attempted to chokeslam Seth into the announce table, but Seth wiggled out of the hold and escaped into the crowd. I backed away from the Demon, hiding from his view just to be on the safe side. Bubba Ray and Devon set up Kofi for their 3D attack, and Bubba Ray pinned him for the win. Kane rolled into the ring, ignoring everyone as he searched for the prize, Seth's title belt. He held it above his head to the cheers of the crowd, but then Bubba Ray took hold of his wrist to raise his arm in victory.

Kane dropped the title and chokeslammed Bubba Ray. Devon went to his brother's aid, and only got a chokeslam for his effort. Kofi stumbled to his feet by that point, and simply walked into Kane's grip on his throat. Big E went to Kofi's rescue and was caught as well. Xavier rushed at him and got a big boot to the face right before Kane did a double chokeslam on Kofi and Big E. I had snuck around the ring by that point and grabbed the title. I walked quickly up the ramp before I caught the Demon's notice. Seth was waiting for me, and pushed me behind him. I heard the crowd yelling, and peeked around Seth to see the Demon Tombstone Piledriving Xavier into the mat. He got up and looked around for the title, but it was nowhere to be seen. I clutched it tightly as the Demon looked towards Seth and drew his extended thumb across his throat. I shuddereded, even though his sights were not set on me.
"No! You can't have it! It's mine! I'm the champion!!" Seth screamed. "You'll never be champion!!"

Kane only smiled menacingly as Seth herded me to the back.
Sorry for the lack of updates. Any updates on any of my stories, WWE or otherwise. It's been... it's been difficult, to say the least. But, here's a new chapter. Hope you enjoy it.

"Hey… how you feeling?" I asked Seth. He was laying down on a couch in his private locker room, his arm over his eyes. "You get enough sleep?"

"Yeah, that massage you gave me really put me out like a light. When did you get so good at it?" He still looked tired, but it wasn't as bad as it had been before when he collapsed.

I shrugged. "I dunno. You're a little easier to read than Ro or Dee when it comes to that."

He chuckled.

"What? What's so funny?"

He shook his head. "Nothing. Don't worry about it. My match is at the end of the night, right?"

"Yeah."

"I'm going to take a quick nap. Wake me at the match before mine. Ah, wait." He sat up and grabbed his phone. After fiddling with it, he set it aside and beckoned for me to sit next to him. He then proceeded to wrap his arm around my shoulder and pulled us both down so that we were laying on the couch. It was an odd position, a bit too intimate but not uncomfortable. "Cuddly and warm," he muttered. "Just like a little teddy bear."

"You're an idiot," I said softly, but I was smiling. "Sleep well."

**********

I watched the show on mute from the monitor available in Seth's locker room while he slept. His phone alarm went off just after New Day's tag match with the Dudleyz, but before Big Show's match against Brock Lesner started. It was the first of several matches in Brock's Go To Hell Tour, and Brock won this one.

"Man, I'm glad he's not after the title right now," Seth murmured. We were still cuddled on the couch. I knew I should get up. Seth was awake and no longer in need of a "teddy bear". I also knew that I should have refused him as soon as he pulled me into an embrace. I knew all this. And yet, here I was, not moving an inch. I felt warm, and safe. It was nice.

A flash of Richard's face played in my mind, and I sat up quickly. "We should get going. Your match is next," I said, trying to remind myself that nothing bad had happened. I often napped with Dean, but that was when Roman was driving and we had a fourth person riding along and playing navigator, and in addition, I didn't have feelings for Dean like I did for Seth. **Wait, no, I can't have**
feelings for him. I mean… I DON'T have feelings for... Ugh. No, don't think about it, don't think about it, don't think about it.

My face was slightly warm as we walked to gorilla together. Seth was stretching as we went, warming up his limbs as he mentally prepared for his match. He talked about random things, like how we just had to get a slice of pizza before leaving town. And how he wanted to go to the top of the Empire State Building, but he wasn't sure if we had time. I agreed to most of what he said, which he seemed happy about. I think there was craft beer and wine tasting in that agreement, but I couldn't say for sure.

We were stopped at gorilla. "Mr. Lesner is… uh… he's adding insult to injury, ma'am," one of the stagehands informed me. "He should be back in a few moments."

"Thank you," I said, and moved Seth to a corner where Brock wouldn't see us when he eventually returned to the back. The last thing I wanted to remind him of was the title. He would likely be on an adrenaline high after his win, and extra brutality to Big Show. Seth was able to finish his warm up as well, plus I could see the steel cage being lowered from where we were. Seth went out first after the video package aired, with me only a few steps behind him. I caught Jon Stewart's eyes in the crowd, and mouthed, "I've got my eyes on you." He looked duly chagrined, and nodded. He and his son were sitting very close to the cage entrance, which had me mildly worried.

"I think he's scared of you now, dollface," Seth said, testing the strength of the cage.

"Good. Because I will mess him up if he dares to interfere again," I replied, glancing over at the older man. His son waved cheerfully at me. I waved back, smiling at the kid. "Only other person I need to worry about right now is Kane."

"He wouldn't dare… not here. Would he?"

I shook my head. "I don't know. I hope not." I walked with Seth into the cage and stood with the referee as Seth continued to check the cage. We were all waiting for John to make his appearance.

The lights dimmed and the spotlight was on John. I took that moment of distraction to kiss Seth on the cheek. "Thanks, dollface," he whispered to me, right before the lights were turned back on. John had some words for Jon as well, but I couldn't hear them. John entered the cage, and the introductions began. Seth handed me his title as I exited the cage. The bell rang. I stayed close to the cage door, just in case Jon got any ideas.

Like their previous match, this one started off slow, but this one quickly escalated. The crowd chanted for John. Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! Let's go, Cena! Cena sucks! A few people cheered for Seth, but not enough for his liking. "This is my time!" he screamed. "You are done, Cena!"

John was not agreeing with that sentiment, and fought against Seth's attempts to put him away. Between the pin attempts, the over the cage escape attempts, and the through the door cage escape attempts, neither man was able to get an advantage over the other.

I winced every time one of them shoved the other into the cage fencing.

"Come on, Rollins!" I screamed after a failed pin attempt by Seth. "He's down! Get out of there!"

Seth shook his head. "I'm going to pin him, if it's the last thing I do!" Seth tried again to shove John into the cage, but found himself shoved into it instead. The next time Seth got up and John didn't, he tried to escape through the door, but John was quicker than I expected and caught Seth. It was hilarious to see them alternate trying to climb out and pulling the other back in. "Dollface, help
me!" He had John by the ankles and was using all his weight to pull him back in.

I gave him a Look. "No. You get encouragement and that's it."

"Damn it!" He let go of John, jumped onto the ropes, grabbed the cage door, and slammed it onto John's face. Seth tried to pin him again, but no luck there. John was breathing heavily, exhausted by the match. Seth snarled a curse and tried to escape over the top of the cage, but somehow, John was able to get up. He pulled Seth down, AA'ed him hard, and went for a pin. Seth kicked out, much to my relief. John tried to escape over the top of the cage next.

"Get up, Rollins!" I yelled.

Like a cat, he was up and jumping onto the ropes. He grabbed John, Superplexed him off the top rope, then rolled him up for a Falcon Arrow. How John managed to kick out of that is beyond me. Seth was definitely frustrated and went for the top of the cage again. I was impressed that he actually made it over the top, and almost down the other side. Unfortunately, John had just enough energy to catch up with Seth and grab him by the hair to pull him back inside the cage.

"Get off of him, Cena!" I yelled, banging on the fencing. John looked at me like I was crazy. I didn't care. Seth had been hanging by his arms and where John had grabbed his hair, and that was it. I could only imagine how painful it was.

Seth and John got back to the top of the cage, exchanging blows precariously perched up there. "I hate you guys so much right now," I muttered, covering my eyes. If Seth was going to fall off and bust his head open, I didn't want to see that. I didn't open them again until I heard the crowd die down a little and saw that both men were back inside the cage. John clotheslined Seth three times in a row, though Seth got one good Enziguri to the side of John's head, sending John into the corner. Unfortunately, it was the corner with the door. Shakily, John got to his feet and called for the door to be opened. He almost made it out. Seth ran and jumped. Scrambling over the top, he grabbed the door and slammed it into John's face again, knocking him back. Seth tried to escape, but John was only momentarily stunned and grabbed Seth's legs, pulling him back in. He tried to AA Seth again, but Seth landed on his feet and Superkicked John not once, but twice. Both men fell to the mat, Seth falling into the pin, but he only got to two and three quarters count before John kicked out.

Seth got to his feet first. He was shaky, but mostly stable. John was quick to follow and tried for the STF Lock. Seth reversed it. He looked like a man possessed, screaming for John to tap out.

"Tap! Come on, John! Tap out!"

John struggled, and for a second, I thought he might tap, but then he got his legs under him, and lifted Seth like a heavy bag in a workout. He tried to AA him, but Seth managed to wriggle out of John's grasp… and hit him with a low blow.

I shook my head. As distasteful as it was, it was technically not illegal and didn't disqualify Seth. John was definitely down and not getting up any time soon. He got to the top of the cage with little movement from John. Then Kane's music started.

"Oh, shit…" I said, and ran to the other side of the cage where Seth was. "Hurry up, Rollins! Get down here!"

Seth was frozen as Kane made his way down to the ring.

"Seth! Jump!!" I screamed.
Seth stared at Kane, then glanced at me. Kane was only five feet away from me now, and the only thing stopping Seth.

"Jump!"

And Seth did jump. Just not to the outside. Instead, the idiot did a frog splash off the top of the cage onto John. Well, he tried. And John moved. Seth hit the mat hard, landing on his feet. I winced at the impact. John picked him up as he got to his feet, and AA'ed Seth successfully, pinning him for the win.

I ran around the other side of the cage to get inside to Seth. "Oh, god, Rollins, are you ok?" I asked, checking on him. I kept my eye on Kane, who was circling the cage. "We have to get out of here. Right now. Can you stand?"

"Yeah," Seth croaked. "I think so..." We got him to his feet, but when we turned to the cage door, Kane was standing just inside of it. He closed the door and loomed closer. "No, no, nononononono..."

I placed myself in between Seth and Kane, backing Seth into the corner. "Just stay behind me," I hissed at him. I was mostly certain Kane wouldn't hurt me just to get to Seth. Unfortunately, in his panic, Seth tried to climb out of the cage, making it easy for Kane to simply reach over me and grab Seth by the throat. He tried to Chokeslam Seth, but Seth kicked him and escaped his grasp. He did not, however, escape the cage when he tried to exit through the door. Kane grabbed him and completed the Chokeslam. The crowd called for "one more time", which Kane obliged with a Tombstone. I scrambled over to Seth's side. He was breathing.

It took a while for Kane to leave, but once he did, Seth got up. I had to help him out of the ring, and to the backstage.

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Raw - October 5, 2015

Brock started off Raw, and I made sure Seth stayed behind the doors of the Authority's office while Brock and Paul were in the building. Stephanie was in a good mood and didn't seem to mind my presence as much as usual as we watched Brock and Paul. Big Show came out as they were leaving the ring, and taunted Brock. All that earned him was a nasty F-5 into the mat. Normally, I wouldn't care too much, since Big Show can take care of himself, but tonight was a little different. I had grabbed a candy bar before Paul had started and was now twisting the empty wrapper in my hands nervously as Seth spoke.

"What am I supposed to do now?" Seth asked. "Big Show was supposed to be my tag partner! You have to call off the match."

Stephanie gave Seth a look of amused disbelief. "Seth. I'm not going to call off a match."

"I can't take on both the Dudley Boyz by myself!"

Stephanie smiled her cold smile, all amusement gone from her face. "You're the Man, aren't you, Seth?" she asked, glaring at him. "Figure it out."

Seth grimaced and backed down. "Come on, dollface. Let's go find me a partner."

**********
I'll admit, I was a bit distracted while we searched. Roman, Dean and Randy had a match against Bray, Braun and Luke. I really wanted to at least watch, but Seth didn't seem to notice. I only knew that my boys (and Randy) had won because I heard one of the stagehands warning everyone that the Wyatts were on the way and to run while they still could. Two more candy bars were eaten as we hid from them.

I did not, however, miss out on Kane's announcement that he would be Seth's partner for the tag match. Seth didn't miss it either, and went out to the ring to confront Kane. I was only a few steps behind him, curious as to how this would play out.

"Nononononono… that's not how this works, Corporate Kane. You don't get to come out here and just declare that you're my partner."

"I don't exactly see a line of people jumping up to help you," Kane said politely.

"We're still asking around," I said in Seth's defense.

"Be that as it may," Kane said, "I am here, offering my services."

"Kane," I said, "This seems a bit… well, not right. I mean, considering what you and Rollins have been through recently."

"She's right, and here's my final answer to you: No freakin' way, Kane! You can't just lie, cheat and swindle your way into getting whatever you want, and that includes trying to get into my head. I'm not having any of your mind games. Not today!" Seth was so adamant about this, that I almost expected him to stomp his foot in complete seriousness. "Life doesn't work that way, not for people like you!"

I rolled my eyes, knowing it was sadly true. Seth got away with so freaking much because he was so damn charming and charismatic. Kane, on the other hand, not so much. He had other good qualities, but his charm was more accidental when it happened.

"Seth, I am quite serious about my job. My mug that says 'World's Greatest Director of Operations'? It's not just a prop. It's something I live by, something I strive for. And in order to be the best director of operations, that means I have to bring out the best in my co-workers, which means I need to bring out the best in you."

Seth's nostrils twitched noticeably from anger. "I don't need you to know that I'm the best," he snarled. "I have this, and this is all the proof I need. Do you understand?"

Kane chuckled and smiled patiently at Seth. "Seth… have you been to my office lately?" Seth looked at him like he was nuts. "Probably not, so I'll just tell you. I have a poster that I like to keep there, one that I look at a lot, maybe more than any other inspirational poster I've ever owned. It says, 'No one else matters, except the person that you see when you look in the mirror.'" Kane paused and looked over at me, then back at Seth. "Well, Seth. Sometimes, I get the feeling… that you don't like the man you see in the mirror."

I won't say I froze, because that's not correct. It was more like time froze around me, and everything went silent as that sentence sank in. "Oh my god…" I whispered. He was right. It had been right in front of me and I had missed it. I suppose I could chalk it up to being too close to the situation, but still, I should have realized. Not that Seth would ever admit to it, not even to himself. In addition to that, I don't think Kane realized how dead on he was. He was just trying to get into Seth's head. Time and sound resumed as normal.
Seth rolled his eyes as Kane continued. "But you see, I want to change that. I want you to be proud of that man you see in the mirror. The thing is, to be the man around here…" He held his arms up and turned around, gesturing to the crowd and the arena. His voice dropped an octave and became gravely. "Sometimes you have to go through hell… and face your demons."

The look of annoyance on Seth's face was adorable, considering the circumstances.

"That's what another poster in my office says!" Kane said, his voice back to normal and chipper than ever.

Seth scrunched up his face. It was his "I'm about to make a bad decision" face. I took a deep breath, and took hold of Seth's wrist. "Hey, calm down. And think about what you're about to do."

"I'm about to 'face my demons' by taking Kane to hell right now." He glared at Kane, who dropped his smile and glared right back. Seth stepped closer to start yelling at Kane, and I had to physically put myself in between him and Kane.

"Rollins, there is multitude of reasons why you shouldn't do that, first and foremost being that--"

Style and grace, I'm never gonna be doooo~one...

"Oh no…" I said, my heart dropping. "Stephanie…"

Stephanie walked out to her music, strutting confidently despite the boos towards the ring. "Will you two knock it off already? Seth, Kane, I've tried to handle this the right way, but I guess it's going to have to be the hard way, isn't it? The proper channels, they ain't doing it, are they, Seth? With your 'anonymous' complaints to human resources--"

"Hey, whoa, whoa, whoa. That wasn't me! That was an anonymous complaint," he said. Stephanie gave him a look and entered the ring.

I rolled my eyes. "Give it up, Rollins. We all know it was you."

"No, it was not!" he insisted, slightly panicked.

I shook my head and said clearly into Seth's microphone. "Who here believes Seth Rollins was not the one behind the 'anonymous' complaint against Kane?" A hand or two was raised in the crowd. "And who here knows that it was him?" Nearly everyone in the entire arena raised their hands, including security staff, Kane, Stephanie, and myself. Seth looked put out.

"Jeez… gang up on me, why don't ya…" he muttered.

"It blew up in your face, get over it," Stephanie said. "I am just tired of this bickering between you two. So, we're going to settle this. The next pay-per-view is Hell In A Cell, and your title match will be against… Demon Kane."

"What?! C'mon!! Don't reward him! He doesn't deserve a shot at my championship!" Seth exclaimed. Kane just smirked at Seth over Stephanie's head.

Stephanie ignored Seth's complaints. "And… as far as tonight is concerned, Kane, if you feel up to it, you will be Seth's partner against the Dudleyz."

"What?!?!?" Seth screamed. I just shook my head. It was going to be a long evening. Stephanie smiled at the two men and walked out of the ring.
"Oh, just… one more thing," Stephanie said. We all turned to look at her standing on the steel steps outside the ring. "If Demon Kane loses the match, Corporate Kane will lose his job as Director of Operations. Have fun." The amount of evil in her smile should be bottled and sold to horror movie productions.

**********

Seth saved his outburst for his locker room. A string of curse words, and then, "Come on, dollface. I need to go see Hunter."

Without the worry about finding a partner for Seth's match, I no longer had the distraction as a luxury. I worried over my two friends, I worried about my brothers, I worried that one of my best friends was headed down a dark path that would only lead to her destruction. I grabbed another candy bar from the catering table before we went to Hunter's office.

"Hey, guys," Hunter said, greeting us with a lukewarm smile. "What can I do for you?"

Seth launched into his own concerns about Kane, and then pointed at me. "Look! Even she's stressed!"

"I am not--"

"You're stress-eating. Don't believe me? Then answer me this: How many candy bars have you eaten today?" Seth asked, plucking the empty wrapper out of my hands and tossing it into the trash. He wiped a bit of chocolate from my mouth. "And how many do you normally eat at work?"

I looked away from him. "Four… and usually none…" I scowled at him. "Ok, fine. I'm stressed about--" I didn't want to admit everything I was stressing over. "I'm just stressed! And I won't know peace until you and Kane finally settle your differences." That was true, just not all of the truth. I would have been better able to handle the stress if Kane hadn't shown up at the MSG show, or if Roman or Paige would just answer a fucking text message.

Hunter put his hands on each of our shoulders. "You both need to relax. Get a massage or something. And… I know at first glance, it might seem like Kane has you right where he wants you, but you have to ask yourself, does he? Does he have you in the palm of his hand?" Seth looked confused. "Look, there's an old saying. Do unto others--" As you would have them do unto you. I had a feeling Hunter was not going to be saying that.

"--before they do unto you. You understand, Seth?"

Seth nodded grimly and then smiled. "Let's go, dollface."

I sighed heavily and grabbed another candy bar when we walked by catering.

**********

I found myself standing behind Stephanie and Hunter later that evening. Seth was next to me, while many of the other superstars surrounded us on the stage. Roman and John were in the ring, standing with several breast cancer survivors. Four years running, the company had partnered with the Komen Foundation to raise money during October, breast cancer awareness month. I knew the subject was near and dear to Roman's heart, and September and October were very busy for him because of it. It was also a time he tended to lean on us for emotional support a little bit more. And it's my fault for not telling him sooner about Seth training me. If I had… he would have one more person to count on at this time. My heart ached at the separation, but I was also happy just to see...
him. It was selfish, I know, but I just missed my brothers so much. Dean sent me texts once in a while, but he's not exactly the most reliable when it comes to texting. Or calling. Or even remembering to keep his phone charged. Renee sent me updates on them, but it wasn't the same.

I glanced to my right. At the far end of the stage, Dean was standing with Randy, near Kane. None of them looked particularly happy about it. The segment ended too quickly for my tastes, and Seth ushered me to the back so he could get ready for his match. I didn't see Roman or Dean for the rest of the night after that, not that I could have talked to them anyway.

**********

"Keep your eyes on him, dollface," Seth said as his music began to play. "You don't have to do anything except that. I'll take care of everything else."

"Are you sure about this, Rollins?" I asked. "Because I have my doubts. I have a LOT of doubts."

"Kiss me and don't worry about it, ok?" He leaned down so that I could kiss his cheek. "Now let's get to business!"

Kane was already in the ring as we walked out. I would have had my little camcorder in hand, but I worried about the quality of the footage. My hands were shaking, from the sugar rush of all the chocolate I had been consuming this evening, from nerves, probably from both. I had talked to the camera men and the production booth, however. They agreed to give me copies of all the raw footage of Seth's matches. It would be a lot easier on me, since they were professionals and I was not. Seth was tense as he entered the ring, though Kane was annoyingly chipper. The Dudley Boyz came out last.

Kane started off the match against Bubba Ray, with Seth telling him that if his ankle bothered him at all, Seth would step in to take over. It didn't take long, not even five seconds, before Kane was hopping around, trying to protect his leg. Seth tagged in, warned Kane to stay where he could see him, and then started mouthing off to Bubba Ray. It didn't go well from there. Kane tagged in and almost immediately tagged back out. I tried to cheer them on, but my heart just wasn't in it. I knew this wouldn't be ending well, no matter if Seth did or didn't follow Hunter's "advice". The next time Kane tagged in went better. Much better. Kane and Seth were finally on the same page, they were working well as a unit... and then Kane tweaked his ankle. He went down hard, and when Seth outstretched his hand as he protested outrage at Kane, Kane tagged Seth in. Seth snarled, but went in and got Devon into a headlock, while Kane rolled onto the apron and called for a trainer. I went to help as well.

"Hey! What're you doing?" Seth yelled at us.

"It's fine!" I yelled back. "Keep your head in the match, we got this!"

"He needs to go to the back," the trainer told me. "I need to ice it down and--"

Seth let go of Devon and pulled a pair of handcuffs out of nowhere. "Where the hell were you hiding those?!" I demanded, but then asked, "What the fuck are you doing?!?!!" as he handcuffed Kane to the ropes. "Have you lost your damn mind, Rollins??" I jumped up onto the apron and tried to see if I could undo them, hoping that they were trick handcuffs that magicians use, and not the real deal. They were very real, unfortunately.

Seth turned back to Devon, just in time to get picked up and slammed into the turnbuckle and Kane. The force of the attack sent Kane to the mat below, snapping the handcuffs in half.
"Go!" I hissed at the trainer. "Take him to the back and make sure he gets to the trainers' room. And make **double** sure that he stays there!" The man nodded quickly and helped Kane to his feet. I debated on following, just to keep my eyes on Kane as Seth had asked me. Seth noticed they were leaving, however, and started protesting.

"No no no no no no! Kane! Get back here!!" he yelled.

"Rollins! Forget about him! Just finish the match quickly and let's get out of here!" I said, getting his attention. "SETH!" I screamed in warning.

Devon had just made the tag to Bubba Ray, and Seth found himself on a fast train to Dudleyville. The headbutt to his groin wasn't the end of it. Fortunately, when Devon and Bubba Ray took out the table, Seth managed to get up and baseball slide into it, knocking both Dudleyz over and ending the match in a disqualification. "We gotta go **now,**" he demanded. I already had his title in my hand. He grabbed my wrist and started to lead me out when the fireballs went off. "Oh, shit…" Sith got in front of me, and then, as Demon Kane walked down the ramp, **charged** at his opponent. Kane stopped him short, picked him up from the floor where he tumbled, and threw him into the ring. Kane got into the ring as well, and was going to Chokeslam Seth, but the Dudleyz seemed to want revenge for what Kane did to them on Smackdown last week. He was on the receiving end of a 3D, and was dazed as the Dudleyz retreated.

Seth rolled out of the ring, but kept looking back at Kane. "Let's go," I pleaded with him. "Please, let's just go."

"Just… just wait a minute…" Seth said. He was looking down at the table the Dudleyz had pulled out and then looking at Kane. "I've got an idea."

"Rollins, **no.** Leave it alone. You got out of his grasp thanks to the Dudleyz. Don't go jump right back into it!" Seth grinned at me. "Godamnit, Rollins!" He reached for the table on the floor. "No!"

Seth picked up the table and slid it into the ring. "Gotta get him before he gets me, dollface."

I was feeling more than a little ill at this point. The stress, the sugar, the **worry.** It was taking a toll tonight. I grabbed Seth's wrist as hard as I could. He looked at me, sudden concern on his face.

"Dollface?"

"Please… let's just go," I pleaded. The crowd was cheering Seth, but they just wanted to see someone get put through a table. "Please, Seth… I don't want to be here right now. Please… let's just go home."

The look in his eyes softened. "Yeah, sure. Ok." The crowd booed as we walked away, picking up Seth's title from where it fell in his attempted attack on Kane.

"Too bad," a voice from the ring said. We turned, the lights dimming as we looked behind us. Red light enveloped the ring. Demon Kane was sitting up and looking at us. "I was gonna **have some fun…**"

I shuddered from fear. Seth held me close and we walked as quickly as possible away from the ring.

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"Hey, you wanna go get some dinner before our flights?" Seth asked on the way to the airport.
"Yeah, sure…” I looked out the window, feeling more down than I had in a long time. I didn't want to be on a flight by myself for the next few hours, only to go home and be by myself there. "Hey, Rollins?"

"Sup?"

"Can I come to your place?"

There were a few moments of silence before he said, "Like, tonight?"

"Yeah… it's ok if the answer is no. I just… I thought I would ask in case it was ok." I bit my lip and told him the truth. "I just don't want to be alone right now. Ya know?"

"Of course! Actually, I was going to ask you if you would let me come over to your place. I feel like if I go home, Kane might show up there, and your place just feels… safer? I guess? I don't know, just a better idea to me."

"Yeah, sure." Richard was busy with seminary school, so there wasn't a chance of them butting heads again. "I'd like that."

**********

“You work out things with Roman yet?” Seth asked. We were in the middle of doing laundry and watching a movie on Netflix. He had been oddly concerned ever since that incident, though I suppose it wasn't that odd, since he knew how close I was with Roman. He had offered to go talk to him, even if it meant getting into a fight and had pouted when I told him I’d rather he not exacerbate the situation.

"Rollins…” I said with a sigh. It wasn't much use to not tell him, since he would just bug me until I did. He was such an annoyingly helpful friend. “No… Dean is still talking to him, but you know how stubborn he is.”

“I still don’t see the problem. I’m clearly the best person for the job. I don’t even mind when you make me eat mat.”

I forced a laugh. “Yeah, well, maybe I should record one of our sparring sessions and he can see exactly what he’s missing out on.”

Seth hugged me suddenly. “Don’t be sad. He’ll forgive you. You’re too cute to not forgive.” I gave him a quizzical look. “You looked like your heart was breaking. I… I know that look on you. And I know how you two are. You'll work it out. I just know it. I know a lot of things, you know.”

"Do you now?" I said with a laugh, leaning into his hug and enjoying his warmth. He leaned down to kiss my forehead and the scent of cinnamon wafted to my nose. “Thanks, Seth. I really needed to hear that.”

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Smackdown - October 8, 2015

On Thursday, I felt refreshed, calm. Surprisingly, since Seth had decided he wanted to tour all the local coffee shops in town during the past two days. And visit the crossfit boxes. ALL of them. He only worked out in two of them, but there had been quite a few to check out before he decided on them.
"Hey, dollface." Seth sat down next to me on the couch as we geared up to watch Smackdown together. Seth and I had an extra day off this week. "Ok, so, don't freak out, but I heard that Roman and Randy are going to be in a tag match against Bray and Braun."

I sucked in a breath, my heart feeling like it was in a vise. "And Dean? Will he be… Will he be with them?" Please say yes.

"No. He was sent to Saudi Arabia to represent the company." I frowned. I hadn't known at all. "He's got a chaperone, thankfully, so I don't think he'll make too much of a mess. But you gotta promise me you'll stay with me. No matter what happens. You have to stay with me." I wasn't about to leave my own apartment to fly to whatever city Smackdown was in, considering this was a pre-recorded show, but I knew that wasn't what he meant. He took my hand in his. "Stay with me?"

I nodded, wishing that I could at least talk to Roman before his match. They were the main event, as it turned out. I saw the end of the match. Roman won by disqualification when Bray hit him in the stomach with a steel chair. Seth shut the tv off before I could see more.

"You don't need any more of that in your head, dollface." He was quiet as he said it. Did he know? Did he realize what went through my mind whenever I saw him holding a steel chair? Whenever I saw someone holding a chair over Roman or Dean? No, I doubted it. He probably meant seeing Roman and Bray rip each other apart. Roman would rebound, I just knew it, and he would teach Bray what it meant to mess with a Samoan.

"Don't call me dollface," I whispered, leaning on him.
I knocked on the door to the Authority's office before walking in. Kane was standing over the phone, pressing buttons. "Shoot… how do I…?"

"Need some help?" I asked. He looked up at me and smiled.

"Yes, please tell me you know how to take someone off hold. Stephanie and Hunter are calling me, but it got forwarded from the arena offices and I just can't seem to figure it out."

I walked over to the phone and pressed the blinking red light that signified a call was waiting. "-- llo? Kane? Can you hear me?" Stephanie asked.

"Yes, loud and clear! Where are you guys?"

"Well, we're just taking off right now. There was just… a whole lot of confusion at the airport… Anyway, we need you to take charge ok?" We heard Hunter in the background, telling Stephanie to tell Kane to get me to help him. "Oh, right, yeah, if you need it, get her to help you. We need you to be as professional as possible. Can you do that Kane? What? No, this is a business call. Don't make me take down your name and call the charter company."

"Yes, of course!" Kane was smiling too broadly for me to believe that. "But, I'm in charge, whatever I say goes, right?"

There was a fumbling sound over the phone, and Stephanie could be heard arguing with a flight attendant. "Kane," Hunter said, a warning tone in his voice, "That is correct, but this business between you and Seth, you can leave it until Hell In A Cell, right? I need you to be professional."

"Yeah, sure, of course. Completely, one-hundred-per-cent pro-fesh-on-al!" Kane said. I shook my head as he hung up with Hunter and Stephanie. "Ok, so, first order of business, I need you to tell Seth that he has a match tonight."

I stared at Kane dubiously. "Yeah, with Stardust. Right?" I said. The match had been the one Seth had been preparing for.

"Nope! That's changing. Stardust wanted a match against Neville anyway. No, his match for this evening will be against me." I half expected Kane to clap his hands like a child in his excitement. He was just so gleeful over it. "And… that match will be a lumberjack match."

I groaned and did a facepalm. "Kane… I'll be honest, none of this sounds professional to me. I'm pretty sure Hunter and Stephanie are going to blow a gasket when they get back."

Kane shrugged, still smiling. "I'll be honest to them, and cross that bridge when I get to it."

**********

Dean went out to greet the crowd and start the show. I grinned as he spoke about not wearing a tie to start the show, about being more of a man of action, and then about wanting a fight. I missed him so very much. Then Randy came out. Apparently, Randy and Dean were going to be teaming up at Hell In A Cell, against Luke Harper and Braun Strowman. I did not like this. Not. One. Bit.
Neither did Dean. That much was clear. Then New Day came out and started talking shit. It was fine at first, until they compared themselves to the Shield. "I'm going to kill them!"

An arm snaked around my waist, anchoring me in place. "No, you're staying right here. Let Deano and Randy take care of them. I mean, Dean looks as mad as you are. Oh, shit, and they had to go and poke the Viper, too. Too bad. I kinda liked those guys." He didn't sound like he liked them. His eyes were narrowed dangerously as he watched them on the screen. I calmed down a bit at that.

I guess even Seth holds some things about the past with respect. I was extremely glad to see Kane announce that Randy and Dean would be facing the New Day in the ring. Hmm… even Kane is having none of New Day's trash talking. Interesting.

Randy was pinned by Kofi after Dean tried to help block Big E and Kofi shoved Randy into Dean. I worried about how they would fare together at Hell In A Cell.

**********

I wanted to say I felt bad for Rusev, getting slapped and humiliated by Summer Rae in front of everyone, but I wasn't. I had seen the news break on TMZ over the weekend, but I had known about Lana being engaged to Rusev for the past month. I had told her she was playing with fire, but if she truly loved Rusev, then I could only wish them the best of luck.

She had replied, "Sum day, you vill find happiness with yur man."

"I don't think I'll end up marrying Richard, but thank you, Lana."

"Not him," she had said and looked over at Seth. I had to shake my head even more at that.

**********

I hadn't told Seth yet about his match, but it was only going to get harder the longer time went on. "Hey, Rollins" I said, keeping my eyes on the monitor. Roman was on the screen. He had a match next against Braun Strowman.

"What's up?"

I was about to tell him, but then the match between Roman and Braun started. "Oh, fuck…” I muttered. I couldn't think of anything else except concentrating on the match.

Roman's long and grueling match against Braun ended with him winning via countout, but the Wyatts tried to gang up on him. Fortunately, Roman did not stick around and he did not fall for Bray's taunts. I didn't breathe easy until I saw that he was safely away from the Wyatts.

"So… what is it about my match?" Seth asked me once my attention was free again.

"Oh… right… the thing is… it got changed."

"No Stardust?"

"Nope. Even better." My tone was sarcastic, and Seth picked up on it.

"Damn it, it's against Kane, isn't it?!" he demanded.

I nodded. "And he made it a lumberjack match."

"Fuck…” Seth was seething. His hands were clenched into tight fists. All of a sudden, he grabbed a
water bottle and threw it at the door. It bounced off, hitting him in the thigh, but doing no damage. "Fuck you, Kane!!" he screamed. "It never ends with this guy!!"

I sighed. "Rollins…"

"How is he getting Stephanie and Hunter to agree to this shit?"

I tilted my head in curiosity. Had Seth not heard? "They haven't. Kane's in charge tonight. The bosses are stuck en route, probably still up in the air as we speak."

"Son of a… I'm calling them right now!" He grabbed his phone and tried, but considering they were having trouble calling out, I wasn't surprised when Seth wasn't able to reach them. "DAMN IT!" He almost threw his phone, but I stopped him.

"Hey, don't break your phone. You love this phone."

He looked down at it. "I do love this phone. All my music… my photos…” He grinned at that, but then frowned as he remembered and asked, "But what about Kane?"

"Look, he…” I couldn't defend Kane. Not now. Not when I disagreed with him on making this match. "Hopefully, Hunter or Stephanie will call again, and Kane will likely tell them about the match. They will stop him. And if the match goes through…” I bit my lip. "If the match goes through, I'll help you. Ok?"

"Help… you'd help me? Against Kane?" He looked so incredulous and so freaking happy about it, I started to panic.

"Well, I mean, it's unfair, and he's clearly abusing his power tonight, and it's a lumberjack match, so technically speaking, any interference from me is legal, and-- oof!" Seth was hugging me tightly.

"Thank you, dollface. You have no idea what this means to me," he whispered against my hair.

"Shut up," I said, blushing. "I probably won't even be effective."

"It's the thought that counts. Come on, let's go see if we can get some additional help." He was nuzzling the top of my head, making my brain go fuzzy.

"'K…"

**********

We eventually came across Big Show. "Oh, thank goodness!" I muttered. Though… Big Show hadn't exactly been on the Authority's side recently. And by his laughter at Seth's proclamation that they were family and family always had each other's backs, I was pretty certain he wasn't on Seth's side at all.

"You're a funny guy, Seth," he said, wiping away tears from his eyes as he left, chuckling to himself.

"Damnit!" Seth hissed to himself.

"Rollins…” I wanted to provide some comforting words, but I had nothing. Then Kane popped up, scaring the crap out of both of us.

"You," Seth snarled. "What do you want?"
"Oh, I just wanted to inform you that your match tonight won't be against me. Hunter ordered it."

Seth sighed visibly, a grin growing on his face. "Yes! Hunter came through!"

"I told you," I said, "I told both of you."

Kane nodded sadly. "But there is some good news. The match is still on, I just need to find a suitable replacement."

"Wait… what?" Seth's face fell as Kane walked away.

"Don't worry!" Kane shouted back to us. "I'll find the best candidate!"

I raised an eyebrow at his retreating back. "This can't be good."

"Ugh… what did I do to deserve this?" Seth muttered.

"It might kill a small rainforest from the amount of paper I'd have to use, but I can type up a list," I offered. That only got met with a growl.

**********

The lumberjack wrestlers went out first. I kissed Seth's cheek right after the last one went through the curtain and before his music started playing. Once we were in the ring, he paced like a nervous cat. I was nervous as well, wondering who Kane would choose, scared that it would be Demon Kane walking down the ramp.

Sure enough, the pyro went off and the arena was bathed in red light as Demon Kane came down to the ring. Seth swore loudly, but I don't think anyone heard him besides Eden, the ring announcer, and myself, and she didn't care. Seth tried to run with me in tow, but the lumberjacks were doing their jobs before the bell even rang and separated us, throwing him back into the ring before he got even two steps away.

The bell rang and Seth and Kane were going at it. It, um… It did not go well for Seth. None of the lumberjacks gave him any leeway, though they certainly kept a healthy distance from Kane. Except Big Show. He may not have been on Seth's side, but he certainly wasn't on Kane's either, and when Kane attacked him, Big Show answered him with a Knockout Punch. Kane went down and Big Show left the ring area. After that, it went in Seth's favor, more or less, but Kane was not out of the match just yet. Seth threw everything at him, but it wasn't until Kane fell to the outside that the lumberjacks went nuts. New Day started to attack Kane, along with a few others, and the rest of the lumberjacks went to Kane's rescue. There were just so many fists flying, I couldn't allow Seth to accidentally get hit by one. As quick as possible, I looked under the ring and found a kendo stick. Seth was in the farthest corner from the fighting, but these guys are predictable. The fighting would move to the ring sooner or later if it wasn't stopped. I got Seth up to a sitting position and stood in front of him.

"Dollface?" he asked in confusion. "You losing your temper?"

I rolled my eyes. "No, you idiot. I'm defending you. I won't attack them. But I can at least fend them off while you rest a bit," I told him. As I expected, the men brought their fighting into the ring. I feel that I did pretty well. As I told Seth, I wasn't attacking them, I was merely deflecting anyone that came near Seth. Except for Stardust, who was shoved into me by someone else. I shoved him right back, but unfortunately, it was right into Kane. I felt a little bad about that one. He got Chokeslammed. So did Xavier Woods.
"Get out of the ring, dollface." Seth mussed my hair. "I got it from here."

He did not have it from there, but I admire his temerity. He tried to Pedigree Kane, but only got a Tombstone Piledriver for his efforts.

^v^v^v^v^v

Smackdown - October 15, 2015

"How did you manage to get two weeks off in a row?" I asked.

"Champion perks!" Seth said, flipping through the vinyls. "Nothing that great here."

I snorted and leaned against the pillar next to the music section. "This is the first time I've ever heard of a champion getting this kind of benefit."

Seth shrugged and moved on to the next row of music. "Fine, I may have requested it. Can you blame me? You wanna go in to work, you're more than welcome to, but I'm not looking to potentially run into Kane. Honestly, you should be worried about running into any of the Wyatts. If you think they forgot about you just because you haven't been around Roman or Dean, you're dead wrong."

I sighed. It's not like I hadn't noticed Bray's minions watching me. Whether they were looking to do some damage or just wanted to spot any weak points for Roman, I didn't know. I stayed with Seth or the Divas while at work. Becky had asked me why I came in to such a hostile work environment, when I could just stay safely at home. "I refuse to let fear win," I told her. She had grinned at me and laughed, telling me that's what she liked about me.
Roman still wasn't talking to me. Dean was worried. "It's ok, Dee," I told him over the phone. I was sitting in the rental car in the parking lot. Dean was in another car, across the lot. If I leaned forward all the way, I could just barely see him. He had apparently been waiting in that car until he saw me come in and called as soon as he saw me park. "I can be patient. It's one of my best qualities."

"One of these days, you're going to blow your top, and god help anyone in your path."

"Why does everyone keep saying that…" I muttered.

"Because it's the ones with the looong temper that ya gotta fear," Dean said with a chuckle. I heard a beep through the phone. "Oh... got a text. Let's see... cool how I don't even have to hang up with you-- Shit..."

"What is it? What's wrong?" I asked, worried that something had happened to Roman.

"Ugh... it's Randy. He's been injured. Probably the work of the Wyatts," Dean growled. "I gotta go, kiddo. Management wants to speak to me since we were supposed to team up on Sunday."

"Oh..." I felt a little bad that I was relieved to hear that it was Randy and not Roman that had been targeted. "Yeah, sure... Good luck, Dee."

"Thanks, kiddo. Feel like I'm gonna need all the luck I can get."

**********

I watched Renee's interview with Dean later. He said he didn't care what he had to do, but he was going to bring the fight to the Wyatts tonight. It made me nervous. When Dean said he'd do anything, he meant anything. I only hoped that Roman or Renee could talk some sense into him before he got himself into trouble.

**********

"Tch, that Shawn thinks he's so great..." Seth muttered. We were watching Shawn Michaels make his way to the ring. Steve Austin had introduced Undertaker at the beginning of the show, and Shawn was supposed to do the same for Seth in the second hour.

"Shut up, Rollins. I know you idolize him."

"No, I don't," he insisted, but it was in that panicked voice he got when he was caught in a lie. "And I'm not jealous of him either!"

"I didn't say you were," I said, smirking. We were watching on a monitor inside gorilla position.

Seth was fuming as we listened to Shawn speak about the history of Hell In A Cell, about Undertaker versus Brock, and then he started to speak about Roman getting redemption inside the Cell. "And I believe those two matches are gonna tear the house down."

"That does it!" Seth started marching out.
"Rollins! What the hell???

"HIT MY MUSIC!" he yelled as he walked towards the curtains. I scurried after him, following him all the way to the ring. He stood toe to toe with Shawn, the two of them sizing each other up. Seth had a fake smile plastered on his face, looking a lot more patient than I knew he actually was. "What are you doing, Shawn?"

"Whaddaya mean?" Shawn asked.

"He--"

"I mean," Seth said, cutting me off, "You're supposed to be introducing me, talking about my accolades, not your trips to the Cell or any of the other matches. You were given explicit instructions, Shawn."

Shawn gave Seth a goofy little grin. "Oh… well… you know, I spent so many years in the back, being told to do this and to do that… but whenever I come out here, it's just… POOF! It's gone. So, I just do my own thing. Have a little fun!" The crowd cheered at that. "And, to be honest, we were doing just fine until you showed up to spoil all our fun."

"Ooohhh, I see, I see..." Seth said, annoyed. "Well, I guess I'm even more of a spoilsport because I have to remind you, these orders didn't come from me. They came from your best friend, Triple H." Seth was staring so hard at Shawn, I almost expected Shawn's head to catch fire. Seth suddenly grinned. I had a Bad Feeling. "And honestly, if you don't want to follow his orders, that's not my concern. That's between you and him. But I hear you talking about Undertaker, about Brock--"

"Rollins!" I hissed in a whisper, "Maybe don't encourage those two titans to come out and kick your ass? Just a thought."

Seth rolled his eyes. "Fine. Talking about Bray Wyatt and Roman freakin' Reigns... That better, dollface?"

I was ready to murder him. "No. And you know it."

He shrugged and turned back to Shawn. "All of them, they're old news. I mean, are you kidding me? No, you should be talking about the Man who's gonna… 'stop the show' this Sunday." Seth was grinning like a mad man at his stupid play on Shawn's nickname.

"Oh, Rollins, you're soooooo clever. I'm sure Shawn has never heard that one before," I said, rolling my eyes. Seth was still too pleased with himself even though both Shawn and I were not amused in the slightest.

"Shawn, you need to be talking about the champion who's taken on all comers, and destroyed them all! You need to be talking about the guy who everyone seems to be calling Shawn Michaels Two Point OH."

"I have literally never heard anyone call you that, you idiot." Seth ignored me.

"Except... everyone knows I'm a lot better than the original."

I slapped my palm to my face. "Damnit, Rollins..."

"If you want to talk about Hell In A Cell, that's fine, but you should be talking about Seth. ROLLINS." Seth smirked at Shawn, who had had enough of Seth. I couldn't blame him.
"You know, Seth, if I had a nickel for every guy who was supposedly the next me... Dude, I'd be a billionaire."

I snorted at that. "At least you're in plentiful company, Rollins."

Shawn grinned at me. "Right? They could start a nationwide club."

"Not helping, dollface," Seth growled.

Grinning at him, I said in a sing song voice, "Not try~ing to, swee~tums." Seth got a funny look on his face for a second before Shawn took back his attention with a laugh.

"You know, I find it funny when guys like you spout off about being 'Shawn Michaels Two'. You're perfectly content to be that, to aspire to be like me, and that's the difference between me and guys like you. I would never have been happy being the 'second' coming of anybody. I was too busy becoming the greatest wrestler that ever lived, the first of my name."

Seth really didn't like that. "Hate to say it, but he has a point, Rollins," I whispered. "Besides, you're pretty good at being you. I wouldn't want you to be any other way."

He glanced at me, the corner of his mouth twitching a little, like he was trying to not smile at the compliment.

"Well," I said, eyeing him. "Maybe a little nicer to everyone. And less of an idiot."

He grinned broadly at that. "Not likely."

"So you do agree that you're an idiot!"

His smile fell. "Wait... no, I--"

"Seth, Seth, Seth," Shawn said. "You know, you should be less concerned with me and with what your cute manager calls you when, from my understanding, you have this, like, seven-foot demon on your tail, and personally, I think he's about to getcha."

Seth scowled at Shawn. "No no no no, you don't need to bring up Kane. I will deal with him, don't you worry about that. Look, Shawn, I've been a fan of you my whole life--"

"The first step is admitting to it."

"Quiet, dollface." I made a silly face at him, which almost got him to crack another smile. Almost. "Anyway," Seth said, "I've been a fan from the Rockers to DX to your Wrestlemania moments, but you know what? I think you're a little jealous! Yeah, I said it."

Looking over at Seth, and then at Shawn, I wasn't sure if I should chime in. Seth was oozing jealousy for Shawn, but Shawn looked a little... thoughtful, over Seth's words. Could he be jealous? I mean, wrestling is something he loves but he doesn't do it anymore. He's older, has to be more mindful of what he puts his body through. Meanwhile, Seth is throwing himself into suicide dives, flipping over ropes, kicking people in midair. I could see him being jealous of that.

"You're jealous because this past Wrestlemania, I had a moment that eclipsed every one of your moments from your entire career!"

The crowd began to boo. He had certainly killed the vibe Shawn had had going before. "Uh, maybe this isn't the best time to be discussing Wrestlemania, Rollins."
"No! You think I'm worried about Kane, Shawn? I assure you that I am not. And on Sunday, I'm going to do to him what I've done to every other person who's come for me! Flat on his back and looking up at the stars!"

"Not entirely accurate," I muttered, though I'm not sure anyone heard me.

"You know what, I'm done here. Let's go, dollface. Hit my music!" Only the sounds of the crowd booing could be heard. "Hey! You guys in the back! I'm the champ, so hit my music already!"

"I mean, we could just walk out, Rollins. You don't need your music to walk." Not going to lie, it was very tempting to just leave him there.

"That's not the point! It's about respect. I SAID TO HIT MY MUSIC." Very. Very. Tempting.

"You know, Seth," Shawn said. "The drawback to be the second coming of anybody is that when you tell them to hit your music? They don't listen. Not that it matters, because you're not going anywhere."

I frowned at Shawn, my suspicion growing. "What do you mean? He doesn't have a match…"

Shawn grinned wider. "Oh, but he does, sweetheart. It's up next, and it's against Ryback."

I closed my eyes, willing the need to hit something, or someone, away. "Damnit…" I muttered.

"WHAT?! No! No no no no no no! You can't do that!" Seth screamed at Shawn.

Shawn ignored Seth's complaints. "Sooooooo, hit my music." His theme started to play as he got out of the ring and walked away.

**********

Ryback came out in his cancer awareness singlet. Seth started off in their match, but once he got into a Chop war against Ryback, it went downhill. The guy's arms were the size of Seth's thighs. It was insane that he thought he could meet Ryback on that level. "Will you stop playing around, Rollins?" I yelled at him when Ryback answered Seth's five chops with one of his own, a stinging slap to Seth's chest that knocked him down. It wasn't until Seth hit a shot right into Ryback's ribs that got the big guy to wince. And not just from the hit. No, he was hurt. A chink in his armor. "There! Focus on that!"

He did get more serious after that, though Ryback had been serious the entire time, so I'd say it was about even. It took a bit, and some work on Ryback's ribs, but when Ryback went after Seth while he was in the ropes and the referee was distracted with reprimanding Ryback, that Seth got one final shot in. It sent Ryback reeling and created the opening Seth needed to hit the Pedigree and get the one, two, three.

He immediately rolled out of the ring, eager to get away from Ryback. I brought his title over to him. "Been a while…" he said, draping his arm over my shoulders for support. The match must have taken a lot out of him.

"Been a while… for what?" I asked as we walked to the back.

"Since you helped me zero in on an opponent's weakness. Usually, you just prep me for matches, make me watch those playback videos, give me pointers, things to look out for." Seth nuzzled the top of my head. "Thanks."
"Oh... you're welcome, I guess..." He was right. I guess I hadn't done that sort of thing in a while.

**********

A few of the backstage personnel were talking, but as soon as I came into the catering area, one said, "--but it's-- Oh, shush! Shut up!"

I narrowed my eyes at them. "What are you glaring at?" Seth asked, grabbing some water bottles.

"Nothing... I think." The three were avoiding eye contact with me now, but whispering furiously back and forth between each other. One glanced over at me, then panicked when she saw me still watching them, and ducked her head back down. "I'll meet you in your locker room?"

"Yeah, sure. Gonna go talk to Hunter first, but it shouldn't take long."

Once Seth was gone, I marched straight over to the three suspicious people. "Ok, spit it out."

"I'm sure we don't know what you're talking about," the man said, giving me a nervous smile. I wasn't sure about his name. The other two, Carol and Lucinda, I think, still wouldn't look at me.

"Uh-huh... You've got about three seconds to tell me why you didn't want me to hear about whatever you were discussing when I came in, or else I will personally see to it that your life is made a living hell. All I have to do is snap my fingers and..." I gave them a practiced smile, one I modeled after Seth's devious smile. It was a bluff, of course. My client is notoriously petty and I'm also good friends with a demon and management, meaning I have pull around this company, and while I would never actually abuse it, letting people think I would could be just as effective.

"Sa~am," Lucinda whined. "Just tell her... I don't want Kane coming after me in my sleep!"

"I wouldn't mind," Carol said wistfully. I raised an eyebrow at that. "I mean... uh... ok, look, he's a handsome guy. I make no excuses for who I like."

"You could always try asking him out. Now, Sam, tell me what I want to know."

Sam sighed. "Ok... I mean, it's not a big secret, it's just... Dean Ambrose has a match tonight..."

I frowned, confused as to why they were trying to hide that. "Ok...? Is that it?"

"No..." Sam looked scared. "It's... uh... It's against Luke Harper and Braun Strowman... A handicap match..."

"WHAT?!" I hissed. Sam and Lucinda shrank away from me, while Carol froze. I heard a snapping sound, and felt pain in my hand. Looking down, I saw that I had grabbed a plastic spork and broken it in half. The jagged edge had cut into my skin, but it was shallow and not bleeding. It clattered against the table as I let it go. "Thank you for telling me. Sorry for interrupting your meal," I said. Sam winced as I left. "I'm going to fucking kill Dee," I muttered under my breath.

**********

I did not kill Dean. In fact, I did not even try to find him. I knew that if I did, I would definitely try to do something, like help his crazy ass. Seth found me pacing in his locker room. "What's up with you? I heard people talking about an ice queen and was surprised to find out they were referring to you."

"Nothing... I'm just..." I stopped. "No, it's not nothing. It's Dee! He's gotten himself a one on two
handicap match against the Wyatts. The Wyatts! One of which being Braun fucking Strowman. He's a damn monster, but does Dee care enough about his well being to think that maybe, just maybe, he might need some fucking backup?!

"Whoa… calm down, dollface. Here, drink this." He handed me a water bottle. "Just take a moment… and remember, Dean's a big boy. He can take care of himself."

"But… Braun is… he's…" He was like nothing we had faced before. When we were the Shield, united, it wouldn't have bothered me as much because Dean would have had that backup, a support system. But that was then, and this was now. "I worry about Dean," I said quietly. "Sometimes I wonder if he really does know his own limits."

"I know. You have a big heart when it comes to your brothers." Seth sounded a little sad about that. "Look, as worried as you are, I'm sure Roman's gonna be just as worried once he hears about it. Plus, he's stupid, and will probably join Dean to make it a two on two. It'll be fine!"

He had a point. I hated it when he had a point. "First off, don't call Roman stupid for doing the right thing, and two, fine… I'll try to not worry. Not like I can do anything anyway…" I grumbled.

**********

"There, see? Roman's tagging with Dean in the match," Seth said. Rick Flair was on the screen, talking about Roman and had mentioned he would be in the match. I actually did feel a lot better knowing that. Sighing in relief, I relaxed into the chair I was sitting on. To be fair, it was a really nice chair, with soft cushions and a dozen different settings to customize it. We were waiting in the Authority's office for Stephanie and Hunter, since Seth hadn't been able to find Hunter earlier.

Roman came out to meet Rick in the ring. It was fun, at least until the Wyatts made an appearance. Three of them. Except… one wasn't Luke Harper. "Oh, shit… that's Erick Rowen!"

Roman called Bray over, to sit with him in the ring. Just to talk. Of course, his talk with Bray ended as their talks usually did, with a fight. Thankfully, as soon as Bray made a move, Roman slapped him good. He took his chair and fought off all three Wyatts. They would probably have overtaken him, but Dean was out there in a flash.

"Typical Roman," Seth said. "Thinking with his heart instead of his head." I turned to glare at Seth, when I realized Stephanie and Hunter were there. I hadn't even heard the door open. It made sense that he would posture for them, though I really wanted to slap him at that moment.

"Is this really wise?" Stephanie asked Hunter. "Letting them have a handicap match so close to the pay-per-view? I don't want their match on Sunday jeopardized over this."

"Yeah, well, what can we do about it?" Hunter asked.

"Ideally, they needed a third partner, but with Randy out on injury, there aren't a lot of people they could turn to in a pinch like this," I said. Hunter nodded, agreeing with me.

Seth would have been an obvious choice, but while he was more or less tolerant of them for my sake, I really doubted he'd stick his neck out for them in this instance. I wonder if I can trick him into it? Probably, but it would take a while. I'd have to start now, but I should wait until Stephanie and Hunter are not around. Though… on second thought, it would end terribly, most likely. Probably be easier to just go find someone else. Plus… he DID have a match already… Ugh, ok, let's see… Ryback had a match with Seth, Cesaro and Neville were in a tag match earlier, Dolph is also out since he had that match with Rusev… who else is there? Mark Henry… wait, no, he has a
"Knock, knock, hope I'm not interrupting." Shawn poked his head into the office.

"Shawn! Of course not, come on in," Stephanie said. "What's up?"

"Oh, just wanted to say hi, make sure I didn't miss anyone. Something wrong? You look worried," he said to Hunter.

Hunter pointed at the screen. Roman and Dean were still on it, walking back up the ramp. "Just discussing Roman Reigns and Dean Ambrose. I'm not sure about them having a handicap match against the Wyatts, since Hell In A Cell is coming up. They really need a third person."

"Oh, well… isn't it obvious?" Shawn asked. Hunter, Stephanie and Seth looked at him expectantly. "Just send the Man in there!" He pointed at Seth, who started laughing. Stephanie and Hunter laughed as well. "Hey, she thinks it's a good idea," he said, looking over at me. I just shrugged. While it would be nice to see them on the same side again, they would probably end up bickering.

"No, no, can't do that," Seth said.

Hunter chimed in, "Yeah, what with their history and plus, he already wrestled earlier…"

"Oh, right, right. Gotta protect him. I get it," Shawn said. He grinned. "He's like a kid."

I sucked in a breath. Oh... Oh, no. Rollins does NOT like that.

"Swaddle them, coddle them, rock them to sleep…" Shawn continued.

"I mean, it's our job to protect them," Hunter explained, but Seth interrupted.

"Wait, wait, wait, what do you mean, protect me??" he demanded to Shawn.

Shawn ignored Seth. "Yeah, but remember you and I used to… well, I guess he can't handle that."

"HEY," Seth said, getting in Shawn's face. "In case you didn't see, I already wrestled, against Ryback, and I won. So you know what? I'm going to go out, I'm going to be with five world-class athletes, and I'm going to stop the show, just like I did earlier! Reigns and Ambrose need a partner? They got one!" He stomped over to the door. "Let's go, dollface!"

I grinned at Shawn before following Seth. "While this will probably end in a ball of flames, I admire your skill," I said. He grinned back, winking at me, but turned an innocent face to Hunter and Stephanie.

**********

I had asked Seth if he was sure about this, especially since I wasn't. He assured me that he was going to show that "old man" a thing or two. This had Bad Idea written all over it.

"So, Seth, how do you feel about this one night Shield reunion?"

Seth started laughing, "No, no, no, no! Let's get one thing straight, this is not a Shield reunion." Renee wrinkled her nose at Seth in disapproval. She was interviewing him before the match. "No, that is not what this is about. This is about me proving to everyone, to Shawn Michaels, to Triple H, that I am what I say I am, the Man! And if Dean Ambrose and Roman Reigns want to rehash the past, well…" He chuckled darkly. "Then I'll just destroy--" He looked over at me and his face
paled a little. "I doubt they want to bring it up any more than I do," he said.

I turned and walked away. The feeling that this was all a Bad Idea had returned with a vengeance. I heard Seth calling after me, but I had already turned a corner and he couldn't see me for the moment. I hurried down the hall, eager to put some distance between us so that I could calm myself. To the left, people were milling about, and to the right, an empty hallway that was not well lit. He wouldn't see me there. I could have my space and some silence to think. I veered away from everyone and walked with soft steps. I heard running footsteps behind me, but they passed me by, hurrying down the other hallway. He was about to say he would destroy them, wasn't he? I asked myself. The air got colder the further I went. Those three teaming up was a bad idea, there's no way they will be able to cooperate! Plus, Roman's still pissed at me, so he'll probably not listen to anything I say... If he even acknowledges me at all... That thought hurt more than anything else. Slowing my steps further until stopping in the middle of the lonely hallway, I whispered to myself, "Why can't we just be a family again…"

"Why indeed, little lamb." I whirled around to find Bray Wyatt staring right at me. "Why. Indeed. Family squabbles aside though, I suspect you're still important enough to Roman that if anything… happened to you, he would be most distraught." Bray grinned, and the air around us seemed to get even colder. A shadow fell over me, and I could hear heavy breathing from behind. I jumped away from them, all of them. Braun and Erick had flanked me while Bray had my attention.

I bolted. I tried to run as fast as I could, but I was caught anyway and lifted up by Braun Strowman like I was nothing but a piece of fluff. "S-stop!" I cried out, but he ignored me. His hand went around my throat, but he didn't apply any pressure. He just held me there, held me by one arm. I had to reach the floor on my tiptoes just to not be strangled.

"You should let me go..." I whispered.

Bray was there in an instant. "And why is that, little lamb?" he asked, approaching me from the side.

Because you're just going to unite Seth and my brothers in a common cause, I thought. Not that I could say that. It was true, but... it wouldn't last, and ultimately, it would hurt all of us more than the Wyatts. Keep my distance, gotta keep a distance, nip this in the bud. "Because I am part of the Authority," I said instead, using my most authoritative voice. "And even you, Mr. Wyatt, can appreciate that it is not wise to piss off the most powerful group in the entire company."

"You're scared..." he said, caressing my cheek.

I couldn't stop the shudder. "Of course I'm scared," I replied, not hiding any fear. "Your black sheep has his hand around my throat." Keep your distance. Don't call attention to your brothers. "I'm terrified."

"And they? Are they also terrified, little lamb?" He leaned in. I could smell the sickly sweet odor of mint and parsley, and the subtle, underlying odor of death. "Will they come to your rescue?"

"I am nothing to them. Not anymore. Just dead weight that they cut loose from their lives. I am just the manager to the WWE Champion. I have no value in your quarrel."

"Mmhmm, mmhmm... see, I don't think that's true. You are trying to fool me. Trick me. No one fools the betrayer, little lamb. So you're going to stay with us. You try and run away, and Braun here will chase you down and squeeze that pretty little throat of yours until you turn blue in the face." He was speaking in low tones, enough that I knew he meant every word. Only if you can
catch me. Braun was surprisingly fast, but I knew I was faster. I just needed an opening to make my escape.

"P-please. L-Leave me alone… I'm n-nothing to you." Blindly searching around me, I found what felt like a metal pipe leaning against the wall. Bray, Braun and Erick were too focused on staring at my expression of terror to notice what my hands were doing.

Bray smiled wider. "True. I've squashed bugs with more significance to me. But you're very special to Roman. So that makes you important… to us." He motioned to Braun. I only had one shot, this one opening, when Braun relaxed his grip to shift his focus.

I used the pipe to break his grip and by sheer luck, he dropped me. He reached for me again, but I ducked under his outstretched arms and raced towards freedom. I couldn't stop to think. If I stopped, they'd have me again. All I could do… was run.

**********

"Stupid, stupid," I muttered to myself. The catering area was filled with wrestlers and backstage personnel. Bray had darkened the entrance way for a moment, but had left empty handed. My unease and terror stayed behind. I was shaking still, though I don't think anyone noticed. "So fucking stupid of you…"

"Hey, you ok?" Natalya asked me, sitting down at the table I was at. Ok, maybe one person noticed.

"No. Definitely not ok. I did a dumb thing."

"I'm sure it wasn't that bad," she said.

"I went off on my own. The Wyatts found me."

Natalya stared at me. "Oh… yeah, that would definitely qualify as bad. But you're ok, physically speaking, right? So nothing happened?"

"I was able to escape them, but just barely. They were this close, Nattie. This close!" My voice trembled as I held my fingers millimeters apart. "I don't know what they would have done, I don't want to know. I can't tell Dean or Roman, and Rollins is going to blow a gasket if I tell him…"

"Wait, so… you're considering not telling him then?"

I shook my head. "I… I don't know. I could really use the support, but I also don't want to worry him, not before his match against them."

"But if you weren't at odds with your brothers, you'd worry them?"

I thought about it. "No… I guess I wouldn't. But they would inevitably find out and yell at me."

"So, I guess, maybe you should--"

My name was yelled from across catering. Natalya and I looked over to see Seth standing there, murder in his eyes. "Shit… he knows."

**********

Once we were out of catering and back in his locker room, Seth was squeezing me tightly.
"Damnit, dollface… he whispered. "Don't do that to me… what if they had gotten you? I mean,
Allowing myself to enjoy the closeness, I returned Seth's hug. He was here, he would protect me from the monster. The fear that had chilled my bones rescinded in his warmth. "I'm sorry... I'm so sorry... I just... I wasn't thinking. At all. If I had been, I wouldn't have run off, I wouldn't have gone down a lonely hallway, and they wouldn't have had a chance to find me alone."

"I'm sorry I drove you off in the first place. If that stagehand hadn't come running up to me, telling me he saw the Wyatts going after you..." Seth kissed my forehead, keeping the contact for a lot longer than usual. "You're not leaving my side for the rest of the night," he said with force.

I nodded. "Ok."

**********

We were both more composed by the time we had to walk out to the ring. Roman and Dean were already out there, watching Seth. Ignoring me. As far as I could tell, they didn't know about the run-in with the Wyatts. Or Roman knows... and just doesn't care. Somber thoughts to help me stay focused. Dean and Roman were snickering at Seth when we entered the ring. I stayed behind him, just trying to stay out of the way. The three of them were bickering almost instantly, which was delightfully normal after everything else that had happened. Dean was mocking Seth about how he wouldn't be able to keep up, since he already had a match this evening.

The lights went out, signalling the Wyatts entrance. I debated exiting the ring under the cover of darkness, but stayed with Seth, Roman and Dean in the ring. Good thing too, once the lantern was extinguished and the lights came back on, the Wyatts circled the ring on both sides, watching us. Bray locked eyes with me and smiled. I couldn't suppress the shudder that ran through me, and I hid behind Seth, making sure that Bray saw I was not going towards Roman or Dean for support.

"I got you, dollface," Seth whispered. Roman looked at him sharply, but still didn't look at me. It was probably for the best, even though it hurt like hell.

The Wyatts entered the ring and stood in the middle. Roman and Dean met them there, while Seth held back. I could tell that he was nervous and second guessing himself on being involved in this match.

"Rollins, you should stand beside them."

"No, I can't let you--"

I pushed him a bit. "Don't be scared of the Wyatts and don't use me as an excuse. If I can face them and tell the tale, you definitely can. Plus, they feed off of fear, remember? Keep your head in the ring, and your mind on your opponents. You really cannot afford to underestimate them."

He grumbled, handed me his title for safekeeping, and walked forward. I climbed out of the ring and stood next to the apron, watching as Seth joined Roman and Dean. I wished it could have been under better circumstances, and that this wouldn't end terribly. It really was nice seeing them shoulder to shoulder again. Seth stood toe to toe with Erick Rowen for a few seconds before breaking up the standoff. Roman and Dean did not appreciate that. "Hey! I am the Champion of the World! I am the brains of this operation, so you listen to me!" he shouted at them. Oh, this was going to be worse than terrible. It was going to be a flaming ball of wreckage that would only extinguish from time and maybe a hurricane of rain. Maybe. "You two, over there! I'm starting this off."
Roman and Dean looked at each other, and then at Seth like he was an idiot, which I was in agreement on, and got out of the ring. Even though they were not even a foot away from me, it felt like miles of distance. All I had to do was reach out and touch Roman, but I couldn't. I kept remembering that look he gave me the last time we spoke. I focused on Seth instead, and realized he was backing up from Erick Rowen, who had started off the match for the Wyatts. Seth tagged Roman in.

"Go on! Go get 'em, big dog!"

"For the love of… Rollins, you're an idiot," I said as Roman rolled his eyes and got into the ring.

Roman did not disappoint. He and Dean were doing well. And then Seth tagged himself in. I could see why. Dean had had Bray at a disadvantage, it would have been easy pickings. If Seth didn't underestimate his opponent. Which he did. Of course. I grumbled to myself and refrained from mocking him when Bray turned the tables on him with a swift knee to Seth's stomach. Seth rolled out of the ring to recover.

"Fuck… that really hurt…" he moaned. I knelt beside him.

"Hey, you ok?"

He groaned. "This was a bad idea."

"No shit," I said. Roman and Dean had gotten off the apron and were now next to Seth. "Get back inside, tag out. Let… Let Reigns and Ambrose take care of the rest."

"Whatsa matter? Does the big ol' champ baby have a boo boo?" Dean snarled. "Told ya you couldn't hack two matches in one night." I wished he was wrong, but that previous match had been particularly brutal on Seth.

"Come on," I encouraged Seth. "Just tag out."

He grumbled, looking over at Roman and Dean. "Fine…"

Roman and Dean took charge of our half of the match. Seth provided… enthusiasm. Lots of enthusiasm. It almost made me smile. If he can just keep this up, help where he's able, and-- Dean got taken down by Bray, who bounced off the ropes for another attack as Dean wobbled to a standing position. "Watch your six, Dee!" I yelled. He barely dodged Bray.

"Quiet from the peanut gallery!" Roman barked. "Dean's got this."

I bit my lip. I had spoken without thinking, but as much as I knew this team up Roman and Dean was a bad idea, it's not like I wanted them to lose. Bray tried a third time, and clotheslined Dean. From the ring mat, he was able to get him into a headlock.

"Hey! She's just trying to help! You want to win this or what?" Seth yelled at him. They started arguing, pointing fingers, and then Roman shoved Seth off the apron. He went down with a hard thud. Seth was clearly in pain. I ran over to him and helped him up.

"Can you continue?" I asked.

"No." He was still glaring at Roman. "Take me to the trainer." I wasn't sure if he was lying or not, but I couldn't take the chance, not with Hell In A Cell so close.

"Of course." We started to walk away when Roman jumped down and chased after us.
"Get back here, coward!" Roman roared.

"Ro! Stop it! If he's actually hurt--"

"He's faking it! Like he always fakes it! He's trying to get out of helping when he's the one who volunteered!" Roman lunged at Seth, but I stopped him, physically putting my hands on his chest and pushing with all my might. "Stop protecting that asshole!!"

"He's my client! I can't let you touch him!" That did it. I didn't have time to block as Roman's temper snapped.

It was the slap heard round the arena. Nearly everyone went silent, except those that were focused on Dean and Bray in the ring, but they took notice quickly enough. My face stung from the pain, but it was the humiliation that hurt even more. Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry... The tears were burning my eyes, and I knew I'd lose that particular internal battle. I looked up at Roman, feeling the fury building inside me as the expression of righteous anger stayed on his face. I didn't betray you! I didn't do anything to deserve this much anger from you! I have had ENOUGH of this bullshit!! The referee was busy with Rowen, or else the match would have ended in a disqualification, with Roman winning the match. He didn't see me deliver a hard right hook to Roman's face, actually knocking him back a step. But Bray did. He was laughing gleefully from where his place in the ring. Dean saw it as well, still locked in Bray's headlock, the horror on his face would have been funny in another situation. Roman's face finally changed to match Dean's horror, realizing how serious I was. "Baby girl..."

"Stay the hell away from me!" I screamed at Roman, turning away. Seth was just staring, shocked by what had just transpired. I didn't look to see if he followed me or not. The tears were falling before I even got backstage, and I nearly tripped over a bundle of cords in my haste. Strong hands caught me and lifted me up. I didn't fight it. I was too tired, too broken. The scent of cinnamon and sweat comforted me as Seth carried me back to his locker room.

**********

Roman was waiting for us on our way to the car. "Seth," Roman said, staring him down. Dean was with him, but hanging back a bit.

Seth pushed me behind him. I didn't fight it, even clung to the back of Seth's shirt, wishing this wasn't happening. I leaned into Seth's back, allowing him to protect me, to hide me. All I wanted was to get out of there and not deal with Roman and his current issues with me. "What do you want?" Seth snarled.

"I need to speak to her," he replied, indicating me. I didn't feel anger anymore. I had cried it all out, and all I felt was emptiness. It was a bit of a relief, actually.

"What makes you think she wan--"

"Cut the crap, Seth," Roman growled.

"No! You asked me to protect her, so I'm protecting her. Even if it means protecting her from you!" He shook his head. "You're her big brother, man. You're supposed to be there for her, no matter what, even if she makes dumb mistakes like asking me to help her train."

"Hey!" I smacked his back a little.

"Gotta use language he understands, dollface. In his eyes, you made a mistake. I think it was the best idea, of course." He turned back to Roman. "Think about it. She gets to train with one of the
best. One of the best that you happen to despise. That the Wyatts know you despise." Roman frowned at Seth. "Yeah, I've thought this through. I am the goddamn Architect. Even put out a few rumors to fuel this current spat of yours. Heard some info back on it too. Did you know that Bray currently thinks you have completely abandoned her? That little moment earlier, that really helped sell it," Seth said coldly.

"I would never--"

"Of course you wouldn't!" Seth's sneer turned into a grin. "But he believes that you have. Also believes she's abandoned you, which by the way, dollface, Roman should be able to tell what training with me does. Hell of a right she's got, don't ya think? Really, between the slap from Roman, and the punch from you… Bray's convinced you are nothing to each other. And if you are nothing to each other…"

It was like a lightning bolt. "Then Bray won't come after me, won't use me against Roman or Dean?" I asked.

"Exactly."

"You always know how to spin things," Roman said, disgruntled. "Fine. So she's protected. I still need to talk to her."

Seth looked around, "Make it quick. Never know when someone will come along and ruin a perfectly good ruse." Seth walked away from us and kept watch where the hallway turned. Dean was doing the same, probably had been from the beginning.

"So…" I said, looking down at Roman's shoes.

"I'm sorry about earlier. I didn't mean… I let my anger direct my actions. I never should have slapped you, and… you were right to hit me back. I'm… I'm not gonna lie, I'm still upset. That you picked him over us, I mean," he said. "But I guess I get it. Took me a while, and… after what happened tonight… I knew I couldn't go another day with bad blood between us. Dean told me what you said, that you were scared of disappointing us. Downside of having us as brothers, I suppose. But I didn't really understand that until tonight… You've got a really good punch, and I don't think you would have developed it with Dean, or even me. We set high standards, we pressure you, even when we don't mean to. And with Seth, you can let loose. You don't give a flying fuck what he thinks."

I smiled. "Usually because he's an idiot."

Roman rubbed his jaw where I had punched him. "Well, whatever it is, it's working for you. You've improved. A lot."

"I'm sorry I didn't tell you sooner…"

"Nah, don't worry about that. It was inevitable. With the way us and Seth are… and the fact that you're pretty much tied to him. For now." Roman brushed a lock of hair from my face to behind my ear. "Something like this was bound to happen. I don't like it. Neither does Dean. But for the time being, and I really hate saying this, it's probably for the best that you're with him, under his protection."

"I can protect myself, you know."

"You're underestimating the Wyatts. And especially that Black Sheep."
"And you're underestimating me."

"No, baby girl," Roman said, taking me into his arms, hugging me tightly. "You have an encounter with the Wyatts, you run. You run hard and you run fast. They are not people to trifle with." I really couldn't tell him about earlier.

"Hey, we gotta get going, someone's coming," Seth said, jogging over to us. "She's in good hands, Big Dog. Mine, and her own."

Roman grumbled, but nodded. "I'll see you around, baby girl. This won't last much longer. At Hell In A Cell, I will end it."

I smiled at him, and pulled him down to my level so I could kiss his cheek for good luck. "I know you will."

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"So… someone has her smile back."

I looked over at Seth, an eyebrow raised. He was driving us onto the expressway. "How's your injured ab?"

"It's fine. Just a minor bruise."

"So you didn't need to go to the trainer after all." I should have known. Shaking my head at him, I said, "You're such a faker."

"Hey, Roman was pissing me off. If I had landed even an inch more to my left, that injury would have been very real. I regret nothing I did." He looked over at me with a pointed expression. "Nothing."

I studied him for a while before asking, "Exactly how much of this situation did you plan?"

"I just work with what's in front of me. Assess, line up the pieces, and fire. If Roman hadn't gotten such a stick up his butt about you training with me to begin with, it wouldn't ever have worked out like this."

I leaned back into the car seat. "So… like twenty-five percent?"

"What?! More like seventy-five."

"Mmhmm. So more like eighteen percent in reality."

"Brat. You're lucky you're my girl or else I'd have to take away snack privileges."

"Like you could ever enforce that," I said, grinning and feeling much better than I had in awhile.

^w^v^w^v^v^w^v

Smackdown - October 22, 2015

My heart was definitely lighter as I walked down the hallway with Seth. I felt like I had a new clarity, like I could conquer the world. Seth seemed a lot more cheery as well, at least until we ran into Kane. "What the hell are you doing here?! You were suspended!" Seth yelled. I just sighed.

"Hi, Kane. Suspension lifted?" I asked.
Kane grinned. "I was only suspended on Raw. This is Smackdown!"

Seth was seething. "Well, welcome back. Too bad this is it for you. Such a shame. Because after I beat you-- Oh, wait. Sorry, I mean, after I beat 'Demon Kane' at Hell In A Cell, you are going to be gone. Make sure you make it a good one."

"Or," Kane said, still smiling, but there was zero happiness behind it, "Or… it might be your last Smackdown as champion, so I'm sure the WWE Universe would love to see you in action one more time."

"Fine, FINE!" Seth yelled. "I proved to Shawn Michaels that I was the Man on Raw, so who ya got for me?! Bring it on!"

"Rollins…" I tried to warn him. "Don't poke the bear."

"Oh, no worries," Kane assured me. I was not assured, especially with that smile he aimed at Seth. "It's gonna be a surprise. But, you'll kick off Smackdown, isn't that great?"

"Terrific!" I said, forcing the cheerfulness out. "We'll head there now."

"Oh… and Seth," Kane said as we tried to leave. "If you even think about feigning an injury, like you did on Raw, well, I just wanted to warn you…" His voice dropped down into a growl. "You never know who's gonna show up to stop you…" He suddenly grinned again as Seth glared. "Have a good match!"

**********

Seth was confident as we walked out to the ring. "I don't care who he throws at me, I got this."

"Of course. So long as you don't get overconfident. Now, who's going to face the 'great' Seth Rollins?" I turned to the ramp.

"Why did it sound like you put quotes around 'great'?"

"Because I did," I grinned at him as the warning sirens went off, signalling Cesaro's entrance. "Well, this will be interesting."

Seth was definitely not taking Cesaro seriously, and he paid for it fairly quickly. "I shouldn't even be having a match right now!" he yelled as he rolled out of the ring.

"Rollins," I said, feeling very tired. "Get back in the ring. Finish the match and I'll treat you to some ice cream."

"Hey! I am not a little kid!" He glared at me.

"Then prove it and stop acting like one!" I yelled back at him. He sulked. "Look," I said with a sigh, very aware of the referee counting to ten. "I know you have it in you, ok? And Kane… he's just trying to get into your head. If you leave, I'm pretty certain he'll come down the ramp as the Demon."

"He wouldn't."

"What evidence do you have that he won't?"

"Well--"
Cesaro had had enough waiting and jumped out of the ring, hitting Seth squarely while very neatly missing me. "That's some skill," I said, very matter-of-factly.

"Thank you," Cesaro said, smiling. He had Seth in his grasp and threw him back into the ring. "It is a high compliment from you." He jumped back into the ring and the match continued on.

Stardust and the Ascension were in the audience, with a sign that said "Stardust Section". I suppose it was to mock the Cesaro Section signs that the fans had.

Seth was not doing well. He was too concerned about how he "shouldn't even be in a match tonight" to really concentrate on this one. "C'mon, Rollins! Get your head in the game!"

He sneered at me, and kicked out of Cesaro's pin attempt. Unfortunately, as he twisted, Cesaro adapted and got him into a chin/face lock. It looked very painful. He was close to the ropes, was only a few inches away from them, but Cesaro pushed back, sent them both rolling, tumbling, keeping the lock in place and landing them in the center of the ring.

Running to the side of the ring Seth was closest to, which he wasn't even facing. I screamed, "Over here, to the ropes!" He wasn't that far, but he still needed to make it the three feet, and he'd have to move backward. "Come on, Rollins! Move back!"

I could hear his screams of frustration, but he wiggled and crawled towards me.

"You're there! Hook your leg over the rope!"

He did, nearly getting me in my face, but he was doing well for not being able to see what he was doing. The referee called for the hold to break. It wasn't very long after that, that Seth was able to reverse a superplex from Cesaro, and then kept the momentum to apply the Pedigree and get the win.

**********

"So... I think you're ready for Hell In A Cell," I told him as we headed to the hotel for the night. He grinned. The dark circles under his eyes has lessened greatly from when he had collapsed almost a month ago, but they were still there. I knew he was still pushing himself, even if it wasn't as hard as before. "I want you to get plenty of rest and sleep, ok? Don't collapse on me again."

"You'll take care of me again, I know you will. That was one of the best sleeps I've had in a long while, by the way."

I shook my head. "I'm happy to take naps with you if it helps, but you cannot let yourself get that bad again."

"I won't, I promise. Good sleep, good workouts, and good recovery. That's my new motto." He held up his hand like a boy scout. "I promise to do my best to stay in my best form."

"Whatever."

"So about these naps..."
"Stupid… son of… I'm gonna beat him if it's the last thing I do!" Seth was fuming when he came into his locker room.

"What happened?" I had stayed behind while Seth had gone to talk to Hunter and Stephanie, nervous about Roman's match with Bray being next on the card.

"Kane. Kane happened. Nothing serious," he assured me. "He's just getting on my last nerve." He placed his title to the side of him. "Match started yet?"

I looked to the monitor in the room. "Bray is coming out to the ring. He's wearing a mask similar to the ones we used to wear. His is creepy intimidation though, while ours were power intimidation. Fierce, even. Oh, and Roman finally broke the 'no text' ban, asking for good luck. I did my best." The lights in the arena came back on, and Roman's music started. I appreciated that he still did the Shield entrance. "Fuck… I'm really nervous."

Seth sighed and pulled me over to the couch, and then pulled the monitor as close to the couch as possible. "Sit next to me. We'll watch together," he said.

"We always watch together," I pointed out.

He shook his head. "Just sit down."

I sat. Seth took a seat next to me, and then put his arm around my shoulder and made me lean against him. "I'm right here, dollface. It's gonna be ok."

"You're just saying that for my sake," I said, but I was smiling.

"Yeah, of course I am. I could care less if Roman wins or loses."

"If you 'could care less', that means you care at least a little." I appreciated the distraction as Bray and Roman tore each other apart in their match.

Seth rolled his eyes. "I don't care about Roman or Dean. I care about you." I wondered about that. If he didn't care about them, why did he go to such lengths to make sure my relationship with my brothers could be salvaged? There were other ways to keep me safe during this feud without that part. "Anyway, I was thinking… you want to go to a concert with me? It's a band called Mayday Parade. Zahra's gonna be out of town and can't go with me, but I already have two tickets."

"Oh… yeah, sure." I did enjoy that last concert he took me to. Looking back at the screen, I saw that Roman was at Bray's mercy. Seth squeezed my shoulder. "Come on, Roman…" I whispered. "End it like you promised you would…"

It was by some miracle that he won.

"He won… That means… It's over?" I asked Seth, not sure if I believed it. It felt like it had been going on for so long.

"Looks like your good luck paid off," Seth said. "Let's hope it keeps working throughout the night."
"You going to give Seth good luck tonight?"

I didn't turn from looking at the vending machine. "I usually do," I replied. Seth was nearby and I didn't want to call attention to the conversation.

"Even against your own friend?" Kane asked. I gave him a quick glance. He was hiding in the shadows. It was no wonder that Seth hadn't stormed over here to yell at him. He couldn't see him from the angle he was at.

"Seth Rollins is my client, Kane, and… and he is my friend as well. I promise you though, I will not interfere in the match."

"Not even pointing out my weaknesses?"

I snorted. "That's called scouting the ene-- scouting the opponent. That's fair game. I give my client the best management money can buy, after all."

He chuckled. "I suppose it is. Good luck tonight."

I turned my head to face him. "Good luck to you as well, Kane. And... if it helps, I would be doing the same thing if your positions were reversed."

"I appreciate the thought, even if I don't quite believe it," he said. "But, whatever happens tonight, I won't hold it against you. I promise." Just like that, he disappeared into the shadows. While his demon and corporate side might not be separate, it's somewhat comforting to know that we're not crazy to think he does have that demon as part of him.

The match for the Divas title was before Seth's, Charlotte versus Nikki Bella. Charlotte retained her title. She and Becky seemed to have made up with Paige over the last few weeks. Paige still had yet to return my calls or texts though, making me wonder if she really did want to make up with her teammates, or if she was just lulling Charlotte into a false sense of security. I shook my head. It was not what I should have been concentrating on. I had warned Becky, but she said she and Charlotte were already wary of Paige's true intentions.

I got a text that distracted me from thoughts of Paige.

"Who is it?" Seth asked.

"It's from Roman..." I said, feeling hopeful. "He wants to meet after we're done here." I snorted. "He says I can bring my pet with me."

"Pet? You don't have a pet." I looked at him, waiting for him to figure it out. "Oh, that asshole... I am not your pet!"

I just laughed.

"You got this, Rollins. Now let's go kick some demon ass!"

"Ugh... fine..." Seth leaned down and I kissed his cheek.
"Hey, I'll be there with you, ok? Don't worry." He nodded, but still looked worried. I held onto his hand until the very last second before we went through the curtains.

Once we were at the ring, Seth started getting more confident. At least, until Kane's music interrupted his own. "I fuckin' hate that guy!"

"Calm down. You're going to work yourself into a tizzy before the match even starts. Just remember, Demon or Corporate, he's still Kane and you can beat him. You're just going to have to work past his 'I'm a demon that can't be beat' persona that he really, really, really believes in." I placed my hand on his arm. "You can do it."

Seth stared hard at Kane as he came down the ramp. "Kiss me again."

"What??"

"The lights are low, no one is watching us, just do it."

I wasn't sure about it, but I did it quickly.

"Thanks..." Seth said, giving me a soft smile that made my heart skip a beat. I was glad the arena was currently bathed in red light, because I was certain my cheeks were a bright red from blushing. "Now, bring on that 'demon'."

Once they were both in the ring, Lillian did the introductions and the referee took the title belt. I stood in Rollins' corner, waiting and watching. Seth started off by telling Kane that there was no separation of "Corporate" and "Demon", that they were one and the same. Well, not so much telling as he was yelling, as well as yelling he wasn't afraid of Kane about a dozen times.

"Rollins!"

"What?!!"

"FOCUS."

Seth tried, but he was not off to a good start. For every action he did, Kane had a response. Seth finally gained an advantage with a neckbreaker on Kane, using the back of the turnbuckle to hit Kane in the throat. It knocked Kane down, and made it hard for him to breathe.

Kane still fought valiantly, but it was clear that he was in pain. "Come on, Rollins!" I yelled. "Keep on him!"

Neither man was willing to give up, but both had been pushed to their limits by this point, ten minutes into the match. And then the momentum shifted heavily to Kane's favor. I had to hold my breath as Kane dominated the match. Seth escaped before being put into a Tombstone Piledriver, but Kane just followed him outside the ring. He caught Seth into a chokehold, almost slammed him into the announce table, but Seth escaped that as well, and was even able to reverse it into a powerbomb, but it didn't have the same strength as when Roman did it. Kane merely bounced off the other announce table, and both men tumbled to the floor. The ref was checking on Kane while I checked on Seth.

"Hey, Rollins... I'm here. Talk to me," I said, kneeling beside him.

"I'm ok... I'm ok... Kane?"

I looked over. "He's down."
"Help me back into the ring?"

I got him to his feet and helped him to the side of the ring. He crawled in the rest of the way. The ref climbed in shortly after that and began his ten-count. Kane was wobbly, but he made it to his feet, and was somehow able to climb into the ring to break the count. Both men were lying in the ring, unaware of each other for the moment. At least until the crowd started to cheer for Kane.

"No no no no no..." he said. "It's not possible... He can't... He's not human..."

"Oh, trust me, Rollins, Kane is very human. Just more stubborn than an average human and with demon powers to boot." I looked over. "He's still down. You hurt his throat before, maybe you can focus on that? Not an ideal spot..."

Seth had a wild look of panic in his eye. "It's all I've got... I've got to go for it..."

"Rollins..." I reached between the ropes and grabbed his hand. "Hey... come back to me..."

The look faded from his eyes. "Dollface?"

"Yeah, it's me. Are you alright?"

"No... and I won't be until this is settled. If I can settle it..."

"You can. You will. I believe in you. Take a deep breathe." He did. "Let it out, push all the worry and panic away. "You're Seth fuckin' Rollins, champion of the world," I said with a smile. "And you can beat Kane."

He smiled back, a small smile, but he seemed calmer. "I'm going to end this!" He got back up and went over to Kane, but Kane had just been playing possum. When Seth reached down to grab Kane, he was the one grabbed instead. Kane went for a chokeslam, but Seth kicked him in the sternum before Kane could get to his feet, then quickly Pedigreeed him into the mat, pinning him for the win. One... two... THREE!

I jumped into the ring as the ref handed Seth his title back and raised his hand in triumph. He let go of my hand and caught me in a spinning hug. "I'm so proud of you, Seth!" I said, and I meant it from the bottom of my heart.

He grinned at me. "Come on, dollface. Let's get out of here." He looked over at Kane, who was still lying in the middle of the ring. "Goodbye, Kane. I'd say it's been fun, but it hasn't."

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"So... you want to come with me to see Roman and Dean?" I asked as we packed up our belongings. Seth had showered and was nearly ready to go.

"Nah, but I'll escort you to where they are." He pulled his freshly washed hair into a bun. "Hey... you know what I just realized?"

"That you need a haircut?"

"Shut up. Well, that, too, but no. I realized we've been... we've been back together for seven months now. Or will be. On Thursday, that's the seven month mark." He looked over at me. "More than half a year."

"My, oh my, how things have changed," I said, grinning at him. "I still want to kill you most of the
time though."

"I think I'd be ok if you're the one to do it." He was so serious as he said it.

I wrinkled my nose. "I'm not going to really kill you." He shrugged, looked down at his luggage, left it and came over to hug me. "You ok?"

"Yeah… I just needed to hold you." He sighed and nuzzled the top of my head. It was nice. And then it was awkward, because he kept holding on. And on. And on. And on.

"Rollins, let me go," I said with a sigh as I struggled against him. He fought it. "Come on. This isn't funny."

"Shhhh…" Seth said, holding me tightly. "Just let me have this…" There was something in his voice that made me stop.

"I don't… I don't understand," I said, unsure of what was going on, but my heart was beating rapidly. Too close, too intimate! my brain was screaming. His grip on me loosened and his hands travelled down my sides. It was innocent, it had to be, but that didn't stop me from feeling guilty towards Zahra, towards… Richard. I pulled away enough to look up at him. He was staring at the lower half of my face. Still too close! Still too intimate! my brain screamed, but I felt like something important was happening and ignored my brain telling me to push him away.

"Did you ever wonder…" he asked. "What would have happened… could have happened…" His hand slid behind my head, and he leaned forward a little. For a split second, I thought he meant to kiss me. It felt like an eternity in the microscopic moment of time. Nothing happened.

"Could have happened…? What do you mean? What could have happened?" I asked softly, hoping it would help, hoping he'd make some sense. Could he hear my heartbeat? It felt like the whole arena should be able to hear it, it was just so loud.

Something clicked, I could see it in his eyes, and he was pushing me away, though he seemed reluctant. "Nothing. Sorry, lost that thought."

"You sure you're ok? Maybe we should get you to medical…"

"I'm fine, I promise," he said, his voice soft. "Let's get you to the knuckleheads."

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Raw - October 26, 2015

Stephanie and Hunter started off the show, talking about the PPV from the night before and seriously hyping up Seth's introduction. I wondered if Stephanie believed even half of what she was saying.

Seth was all smiles as we walked out to the ring. Stephanie continued the praise once we were inside the ropes, talking about how Seth had prevailed time and time again, no matter what they threw at him, that they had to be sure of the man that they had handpicked from the Shield. I stood back, watching the three of them. My own feelings aside, I felt like Stephanie and Hunter were up to something. No rest for the wicked, I thought.

It got a little weird when Stephanie and Hunter, beaming like parents, said they were proud of him. I really thought Seth was going to start crying a little, he was so happy. He even hugged each of them. There was more pats on the back, some praise for the Authority, how they believed in him,
that sort of thing. And then Hunter said that Seth had put them in a bit of a pickle, by cleaning out the bin of contenders.

"So now, everyone it going to have to earn their way." That got my attention. "The winners of last night will all compete in matches tonight, four matches total," Hunter said. "And the winners of those matches will compete in the main event, a fatal four way for the number one contender spot against you."

I smiled and looked over at Seth. He was smiling as well. We were both excited about this new turn of events. As they continued talking, I went over last night's events in my head. The winners... ok, let's see, on the preshow, it was Cesaro, Dolph and Neville, and then on the main card it was Alberto del Rio, The New Day, Charlotte, Kevin Owens, Seth, Brock... and Roman. My smile grew wider. Of the winners, the only ones not eligible are Charlotte and Seth, and the likelihood of Brock showing up is pretty low, so... Roman, Cesaro, Dolph, Neville, Alberto, Kevin and two of the three members of New Day are probably going to be in the matches tonight. The chances of Roman making it to the final were good. He can totally do it! While Roman had been in the title scene, he had not gone one on one with Seth in a while, and the thought of a match between Roman and Seth for the title was exhilarating. Ooohhhhh! I hope he wins tonight!

Roman's music started, and we all turned to see him coming down the stairs from the crowd. My smile had to have been a mile wide, I was just so happy to see him. Seth, on the other hand...

"What the hell are you doing here?" he snarled at Roman.

"Just came to say hi," Roman said with a grin. "There was something else... what was it?" Roman tapped his finger to his mouth like he was trying to remember, but I was pretty certain he was just messing with Seth. "Oh, right, after tonight, I will be the number one contender, and I will be taking that title from you. Believe. That."

I may or may not have squealed with delight, much to Seth's dismay.

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"Ugh... I can't believe Kofi lost," Seth said, squeezing his water bottle. It was threatening to pop. I carefully extracted it from his grip.

"You're just mad because it's Roman he lost to."

Seth snatched back the bottle. "And you're thrilled about it. You want him to take this title from me!"

I rolled my eyes. "You are such an idiot. I never said that."

"But you're thinking it!"

"Am I?" I asked him. "Or am I thinking that you and Roman would have a doozy of a match and I would love to see that?"

Seth grumbled.

"I'm sorry, you're going to have to speak up."

"The second one," he repeated a little louder. "He still has to get through the fatal four-way though."
I grinned. "I know. And now that he's done with the Wyatts, I can go see him and give him some good luck in person!"

Seth really didn't like that.

**********

After visiting Roman, I came back to Seth's locker room and watched the remainder of the matches with him. Kevin won his match against Cesaro, Alberto won against Neville, and Dolph won against Big E.

I could only grit my teeth after PCB's match against the Bellas. The Bellas won, but Paige turned on Charlotte and Becky again. I was right to doubt her, and I hated every moment of it. Why do my friends have to be so vicious? Then again, it was what made them who they were. Hopefully, Paige would come back to her senses, but I wasn't holding my breath.

The strangest part of the night was when Bray spoke to the crowd. He announced that he would see Roman again, when he had revitalized himself, but for now… for now, he would consume the soul of the Dead Man, the Undertaker. I had heard what the Wyatts had done to Undertaker the night before, attacking him after his loss to Brock and carrying him away. Now Bray was invoking the name of Kane, calling him out. He appeared, but Kane suffered the same fate as his brother. The Wyatts dragged him off, all while Bray sang He's Got The Whole World In His Hands. I shuddered, grateful that I was able to get away from the Wyatts last time, and wondering if Kane would be ok against them.

**********

Seth and I walked out to ringside before the fatal four-way started to sit with the announcers. JBL was thrilled to see Seth, while he just kind of side eyed me. Michael and Byron were more welcoming. Seth chatted merrily with the announcers, while I kept my eyes on the match. I itched to provide support to Roman, but I couldn't show bias, no matter how much everyone knew I was rooting for him. I had to swallow my screams of joy when Roman changed Kevin's Popup Powerbomb into an elevated Superman Punch, then Speared him, and pinned him to win the match. When I looked over at Seth, I saw the color drain from his face. "Rollins?"

He didn't say anything at first, just looked at me. JBL was asking him something, I couldn't hear what since I hadn't opted into getting a headset, but whatever it was shook Seth free of wherever his brain had gone. He went back to his merry chatting, but I could tell he was faking it. His gaze was laser focused on Roman, who was celebrating in the ring. Once Roman noticed Seth staring at him, he dropped his smile and came out to stand toe to toe with Seth. The very air between them crackled with tension. Suddenly, I was less excited about their upcoming match and much more worried that they were going to tear into each other right then and there. A referee tried to push them apart, but they just shoved him away in unison.

"H-Hey now," I said, stepping up to them. "Let's not get--"

"Congratulations," Seth said through gritted teeth. "You've earned the opportunity to face me and get your ass beat by the WWE World Heavyweight Champion. You'll play second fiddle to me, just like you always did." Seth's forehead vein was throbbing like crazy.

Roman didn't gloat. He merely looked over at me, and then down at the championship. Seth snatched the title up, placing it on his shoulder to remind Roman that he was still the champ and laughing at him. Roman still didn't smile. He was all business for this. "Keep them safe for me," was all he said.
Seth gave a nervous laugh, an attempt to be confident, but both Roman and I saw through it. That was when Roman grinned. He patted Seth on the hand holding the title over his shoulder, the last pat missing its mark and patting the title instead, then turned and walked away. Seth was seething as we watched Roman walk back up the ramp.

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Smackdown - October 29, 2015

The Wyatts had a message for the WWE Universe. After taking the Undertaker and Kane, they could only advise that we should all run. I was incredibly glad Roman was done with the Wyatts, and hoped that Bray would forget his promise to return to him later on, though I knew he would not.

Roman started off the special Halloween episode of Smackdown. He spoke of his dream, of his goal in WWE, to win the WWE Championship. He spoke of those that had proven to be speed bumps along the way, and of how he could be knocked down, but he would always, *always*, get back up. And now… after beating Bray at Hell in a Cell, he was now the number one contender, and the only man who stood in his way was Seth. His little brother, his former ally and friend, and a man who wanted to see him fail. Well, maybe not the only man, since Kevin Owens decided to come out at that moment and whine about how it was luck that Roman won instead of Kevin.

The door opened behind me. "Hey, dollface, I-- What are you wearing?" Seth asked.

I looked over at him. In the spirit of the special Halloween episode, I decided to dress up. I was wearing a white dress made of many, many, *many* layers of gauzy fabric, though I was still wearing my kickass combat boots. It went rather well together, actually. A single layer of this fabric was see through, but the multiple layers covered me up sufficiently, and had a cool effect of looking like a web from a cob spider. There was black thread lining the edges, and embroidering parts of the skirt and bodice with a more traditional spider web pattern. In addition to that, I was wearing a long, black wig, with a simple wedding veil attached to it. The makeup girls promised to do my makeup before I went out to the ring so I looked like a corpse. "My costume. Non-superstar personnel were encouraged to dress up for tonight's show. I *told* you I was gonna be in costume."

Seth was eyeing me up and down. "Damn… that's… that looks *really* good on you. Undead bride?"

"Corpse Bride, actually. Well, more or less. I took some liberties with the dress. Renee helped me find it." I stood up and twirled around. "Isn't it cool?"

"Yeah…" Seth said softly. "Very." He grinned. "You know--"

A knock at the door interrupted him. The door was still open and a pink haired, bright smiled woman popped her head in. "Hey, we're ready to do your makeup now."

I squealed a little in excitement. I usually didn't have a lot done with the makeup girls, but this was going to be fun. "Ok, I'm right behind you." She left and I turned to Seth. "Next time you see me, I'm going to look so awesome!"

He laughed. "You always look awesome. I expect no less this time."

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From where I sat, I could see and hear Renee interviewing Dean. He was telling her that he would
be accepting Bray Wyatt's challenge to "face the fear."

"I'm the man without fear. I slay the dragons, I exorcise the demons, I smash the zombies and I destroy the monsters! That is what I do around here, and tonight I will take down the entire Wyatt Family."

"Dean," Renee said, wincing a little, "The numbers haven't exactly been on your side..." Dean shrugged. "So do you think you're going to be going into this one alone?"

"Alright, you're all done, sweetie," Leslie said, holding up a mirror. "What do you think?"

"Thank you so much! It's perfect, and not too zombie-ish. I love it." I grinned at her and hopped out of the chair so the next person could get their stuff done. Dean was still talking to Renee.

"--interested in joining my little ghostbusting monster squad, but... if I have to go it alone, I will. I mean, partners can be a little overrated, if you don't have a good one. And sure, I might go down in flames, but the real question is... how many of them Wyatt boys will I take with me?" He smirked at Renee.

She grinned back at him as I walked up behind him. "And you don't think you'll have to answer to anyone if you do something so... dangerous?"

Dean scoffed. "Yeah, right. Who's gonna stop me? My mom? She's not here and even if she was, she couldn't stop me. Nah, no one's crazy enough to..." He stopped and thought about it. "Well... I guess there's one person who matches my level of lunacy. But she doesn't know and--"

I tapped him on the shoulder. He turned slowly and I gave him the fakest smile ever. "Over my dead body."

"Well, you ain't looking so hot, kiddo. So I think--" I grabbed him by the earlobe. "Ow ow ow ow..."

"Dean, I swear I will make you pay if you face the Wyatts alone. Roman already had a match but you know there are plenty of guys who would help you if you just ask nicely."

"So..." he asked, wincing from me gripping onto his ear. "You're saying I'll get a double ass kicking if I go this alone?"

"Exactly."

"Eh... fine. I guess I can ask around." I let go of his ear. "You're worse than my mother."

I grinned. "Good."

Renee chimed in. "So, does this mean that you guys made up after that incident at ringside on Raw last week?"

Dean looked sheepish, which means I'm guessing he hadn't told her anything. "Yes, we've all made up. Well, Dean, Roman and I have, I mean. Roman was just trying to protect me, and I didn't quite agree, but we are back on speaking terms, at least, and hopefully, we'll be back to where we were before." I didn't want to give away too much, in case the Wyatts were watching.

"Anyway, I gotta go attempt to find some partners," Dean said. "Later, ladies."

I left as well, passing Bo Dallas who was dressed as a ghost in a white sheet and introducing
himself to everyone as Boo Dallas.

"You sure you'll be ok?" Seth asked me.

"Yeah, of course. It'll be five minutes and I'll be right here." We were standing outside of the Authority's office. They had asked to speak to Seth. Alone. Yet, he was more worried about me staying outside the office than I was about him going into it. "Just… don't piss them off, ok?"

Seth scoffed. "Don't you get carted off by the Wyatts. I still think it was dumb to reveal you're talking with Roman and Dean again."

I shrugged. "Maybe. But it happened before I realized it. If I have to pay for the mistake… well, I'm bringing one of them down with me."

"Ok, that's it. You're coming into this office with me."

"Oh my god, Rollins, just get in there. I'll be fine." I shoved him towards the door. "If you're so worried, just behave and you'll get out of there quicker. Probably." He threw me a Look, but went into the office. I sat down on one of the storage boxes lining the walls, hoping it wouldn't take Seth long to finish talking to Stephanie and Hunter. There were plenty of WWE personnel around that I felt reasonably safe.

"Hello there, little lamb…"

I grimaced, and turned to look at Bray Wyatt. He was alone, no family in sight, looking at me from head to toe. "Bray… what can I do for you?" I was proud that my voice didn't tremble a single bit, though I was really regretting a lot of things I had said today.

"You lied to me."

I stayed silent. Bray nodded in approval.

"I have to admit, it takes a strong will to stand up to mine. Your brothers have it. You have it. Does your lover have it?"

I frowned at him. "What does Richard have to do with this?"

Bray chuckled. "Not him. Him." He turned his gaze towards the closed office door.

"Rollins is not my lover," I said, rolling my eyes.

"Curious… His will can be strong, but it can be weak. Curiouser still. It strengthens when you are near. But you are not lovers. Most curious."

My expression was a stone wall. "We are friends. Very good friends."

"Ah…” Bray said, but he didn't look like he believed it. "Well, find yourself fortunate, that I find that I do not currently have the power to break the wills of any of the broken Shield. You are safe… for now. This… trifle with Dean Ambrose… it is just that. I will not allow any of my family to pursue you four, no matter the outcome of the match. Good day, little lamb, a very good day for you."

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"Ugh… I'm so bored…" Seth said, "Can't believe my match got cancelled. Can we go now?"

I hadn't told Seth about Bray's interaction with me. I hadn't told Roman or Dean either. I wasn't sure what to think of the things he said, except to know that he wouldn't be messing with any of us in the near future. "I guess. Sucks that you came to work and didn't actually get to, you know, work." Dean's match was starting on the monitor. "Show's almost over though. I'm going to stay and watch it."

Seth grumbled.

"You don't have to stay with me, you know."

He grumbled again, not moving from where he sat.

"Fine, whatever. Do what you want." Turning my attention back to the monitor, I saw that Dean had found partners to help him out, Cesaro and Ryback. Unfortunately, though they tried, they were unable to overcome the Wyatts.

**********

Seth whistled low as I joined him in the lobby of the hotel we were staying at. The Mayday Parade concert he wanted to go to was in Iowa, but too far for a day trip from his house, especially with how late it would be letting out. "Damn, dollface. You're gonna stand out like a punk rock forget-me-not."

I laughed. "Is that good?" It had taken a while, but I had decided to wear the sky blue sundress that had been my second choice for my first date with Richard. The added accessories, thanks to Natalya and her leather fashion collection, made sure I would fit in with the rock crowd. It was still pretty lowkey, which was much more the style I was going for. I had even done my hair up in pigtails and used decorative hair ties with skulls on them. It sounded childish when Natalya suggested it, but the effect was pretty fucking cool.

"Oh yeah. Real good. Ah, but don't worry. I'll protect you from the creeps again." He took my hand in his and smiled. "Not letting go of you today."

My heart skipped a beat. "Oh! Um… thanks. You sure this is ok? You haven't been getting a lot of rest lately."

"There is no way I'm missing this concert. Besides, music helps me unwind from work. This'll be fun, I promise."

I didn't know what else to say. My brain was turning to mush with how much this felt like a date. It really didn't help that Seth was giving me these soft smiles every so often, or when he held onto me like a protective boyfriend when the crowd got rowdy.

The music was good, the concert was fun, and I wished it had really been a date with Seth. I immediately felt guilty over that thought, but I buried it deep in my heart. Tonight was our night, and for this night, I was Seth's girl and he was my guy. Tomorrow, we'd be manager and client again, but for now, we were simply ourselves.
Roman started off the show. And oh, boy…he was talking *smack* about Seth. It made me laugh, but I knew Seth would not see it the same way. Sure enough, as I ran to gorilla, I saw Seth marching towards it with an angry determination. I did not catch up with him in time, however, and I wasn't about to walk out there on my own, so I simply watched from gorilla. He must have plastered a smile on right before walking through the curtains, because his attitude was very different from what I had seen.

"*Roman, Roman, Roman… did I hear you right? You think… You think that you can beat me? That is the most laughable thing I've heard in awhile!*"

Roman shrugged while the crowd jeered at Seth.

"*What do you think, doll--*" He looked behind him, and realized I wasn't there. I shook my head. Thankfully, he recovered quickly. "*And… correct me if I'm wrong, but was that a compliment I heard from you, mixed in with all that crazy talk?*" Another shrug from Roman. "*Well, I actually feel the need to return it. You see, you are quite good in the ring yourself. I would never have recruited you for the Shield if I didn't think you were worth the effort.*"

A snapping sound could be heard, and all heads turned towards me. I looked around, acting like I didn't know where it was coming from, but as soon as everyone's eyes were turned back to their various monitors, I left the area. There was a trashcan right near the door and I threw my now useless pen into it. It had been a cheap one, but now my hand was stained with black ink. "*Fuck…*" I grabbed some paper towels from a roll that had been left unattended and tried to get as much of it off of my hand as possible, but there was still a very visible stain on my palm. "*Double fuck…*"

A large hand grabbed my shoulder and yanked me along. "*You need to keep a better leash on your client,*" Hunter growled at me. I found myself being dragged along by him, Stephanie at his side.

"*I'm sorry, sir.*"

He grunted an acknowledgement, but made no other comment. He let go of me once we were at the curtain, but I was mostly certain he didn't want me running off just yet, so I followed them out to the ramp. Seth was looking up at us in confusion from where he was midway down the aisle, while Roman was still in the ring. I could only surmise that Roman was trying to goad Seth into a match right now, and Seth was dumb enough to succumb to Roman's taunts. *Damn it! I should have gone out even if I was late. They're going to ruin their big match with their stupid egos!*

"*Go stand with him,*" Hunter said. "*Make sure he doesn't do anything stupid.*"

"*Yes, sir.*" I casually walked to Seth's side, trying to hide my ink stained hand and to not bring attention from the fans to the fact that I had been remiss in my duties. "*You got me in trouble because you ran ahead of me.*"

"*Sorry, dollface.*" He really did seem apologetic. "*I thought you were right behind me.*"

"*I was five steps behind you, and you know how I feel about coming out late. Next time, check.*"
He grinned at me. "You owe me an apology drink."

"You got it." He winked at me, which reminded me of our not-a-date, which reminded me of how much it felt like a date, and how nice it was to be on a date with Seth Rollins, even if it wasn't a date and-- My head was going into a tizzy. Over a stupid wink. I looked away from him to hide my blush.

Hunter was still angry, so Stephanie took the microphone. "If we're going to do this, we're gonna do this officially. Now, how many of you want to see Roman Reigns versus Seth Rollins?"

The crowd erupted into cheers.

"Ok, ok, now, let's up the ante, and how many of you want to see Roman Reigns versus Seth Rollins for the World Heavyweight Championship?!

More cheers, even louder than before. There were people standing in the stadium seats, screaming their excitement. Maybe I had just been around the Authority too long, but it felt obvious enough to me. Stephanie was not going to give these people what they wanted.

"Well, you're going to see exactly that!!" More cheers.

"Wait for it," I thought.

"Just… not tonight."

And there it is. I sighed.

Stephanie cackled at her joke while the crowd booed. Hunter finally cracked a smile. "I can't believe they fell for that," he said.

"I know, right?" Stephanie said. "You people think we're actually going to give away a match of this caliber? Here of all places?" The crowd booted harder, making Stephanie and Hunter laugh more. "No, no, no, this match will be in two weeks at the twenty-ninth anniversary of Survivor Series." The boos turned to cheers. I had to agree with the crowd. I was so excited for their match.

"But, Roman," Hunter said, "Speaking of Survivor Series, and since you're itching for a fight, we have just the thing for you. Let's have a traditional five-on-five Survivor Series match. You two will be the captains and choose the rest of your teams by the end of the night. Choose wisely tonight, because your survival, Roman, may just depend on it." Hunter smiled that evil smile of his, making me wonder if he had something up his sleeve, even though a traditional Survivor Series match thrilled me. Hopefully, I was just imagining things.

Seth and Roman were already sniping at each other as the crowd cheered their approval of this match. "This is going to be fun," I said happily.

**********

"Dollface--"

"Will you please stop calling me that?"

"Will you just back me up on this one? Please?" Seth gave me his best puppy dog eyes.

I sighed heavily. "Look, even if he says he'll help, I don't trust him to follow through, but…" I sighed again. "If you're sure, than sure. I would like to point out that he literally just had a match,
however, and you're going to have to cajole him with a little more than 'you get to beat up people'.” I looked over at the man in question coming down the hall.

"Like what?"

"I don't know, maybe a shot at the title? He's very ambitious."

Seth nodded. "Ok... yeah, sure. Wish me luck!"

"Good luck. I'm staying over here, since he doesn't like me much." Seth nodded, and headed over to talk to Kevin Owens. I didn't hear most of their conversation, but I did hear the last thing Kevin said.

"Just remember, you owe me one." He winked at me as he passed by. This was definitely not the same kind of wink Seth had given me earlier.

_How does one cultivate a wink into what feels like a warning shot?_

"So that's one on board!" Seth said merrily. I could only offer him a weak smile.

**********

Seth was contemplating who else to ask, which was proving to be difficult. He hadn't exactly cultivated a lot of alliances and the group of people who work with him and wouldn't stab him in the back was a much smaller pool than I expected. As we walked down the hallway, we were greeted by two smiling faces, Kofi Kingston and Big E.

"AAWWWWWW, SETH ROLLINS!" Big E shouted jovially.

Kofi popped out from behind Big E. "Word on the street is that you need partners for a Survivor Series match."

"Well, have no fear, because New Day," Big E said, "is HEEEEEE-YAAAAAAAAAAA." He waved his arms wildly and repeated himself, calming down a little each time. "Is HERE! Is here. We're here."

"And ready to rock and roll, for your team is complete!" Kofi finished for his teammate.

Seth rolled his eyes. "What do you say, dollface?"

I gave the two New Day members the once over. "You could do a lot worse."

"Fine, you want to join the Champ's team, you're in, but on the condition that you play by my rules! What I say, goes. I am the captain."

"Yeah, sure, uh-huh," they agreed. "You're the captain! Cap!" Kofi was way more enthusiastic about it than Big E, but both seemed thrilled to be included.

"That makes four, so we're not quite complete yet," Seth said. "Just one more and-- what are you doing?"

Kofi and Big E had taken their index fingers and touched their hands to their foreheads, as if they were unicorns. They were focusing very intensely, like unicorns that were straining to take a shit.

Seth seemed to agree that it was a disturbing sight. "Stop that! Stop that right now!!"
Big E and Kofi ignored him, only stopping when the sound of a trombone was heard. A heavy sigh from Seth was also heard. Xavier landed in front of us. "I'm BAAAAAAACKKKKKKK!" he squealed. He had been out on injury, caused by the Dudley Boyz. "And, I wrote a song for you. WE wrote a song for you."

I smiled. "Oh, this I have to hear."

"No, no, you don't," Seth hissed at me as Xavier, Kofi and Big E warmed up their vocal cords. "Do not start sing--"

The trombone cut him off as Xavier started their usual three beat mantra. Doot. Doot doot. Doot. Doot doot. The words were pretty simple. "Team. Rol-lins! Team. Rol-lins!"

I grinned at Seth. He was so annoyed from just the music! I couldn't help myself. "Don't you dare…” He hadn't even finished his sentence when I began dancing a little with New Day, wiggling my shoulders and bobbing my head in time to the music. "Don't… don't wiggle against me like that." He was weakening, I could tell.

Big E and Kofi were encouraging Seth to join us. "C'mon, Rollins," I said, looking up at him. "It's fun!" He was fighting a smile, and then grinned madly. He started dancing in his own fashion, surprising Kofi. It felt like we were back at the concert, just a little bit.

"Ok, ok!" he yelled, suddenly stopping. "We cool? We cool. I'll see ya out there."

"Yeah, yeah!" Xavier yelled as we walked away. "New Day and the Captain make it happen!"

**********

"Hey… did you hear?" I heard a stagehand whisper. "Paige won the fatal fourway. Can you believe that bitch gets a shot at the title?"

He didn't see me until it was too late, and I had him up against the wall by the throat. "Call her that again, I fuckin' dare you," I hissed.

"Grf hff…” The man was turning a bit blue. His friend was frozen.

"I don't care what she's done, if you call her or any of the other superstars a name like bitch again, and I will personally make sure you never work for any wrestling company ever again. You respect the fuckin' talent or you get the fuck out of here. Do I make myself clear?" He nodded violently and I let him go.

It took a few minutes of coughing before he was able to speak. He still had trouble. "I… I hear others calling her… and other wrestlers… names like that…"

I raised an eyebrow. "Who?"

He launched into another coughing fit, so his friend answered. "I've heard other wrestlers say that stuff, miss," she said quietly.

"It's one thing for wrestlers to talk shit about other wrestlers. You have no knowledge of what they go through, do you?" Both of them shook their heads. "Then either keep your comments about them to yourselves or have the guts to say it to their faces," I said as calmly as possible before walking away.

I admit, I probably overreacted. I had done something similar when Seth had been bad mouthed
after the Shield broke up. I didn't want to apologize for it, since I knew I had a valid point and I
didn't want to invalidate it with my emotional reasons. Yes, Paige was being a complete asshole
right now and technically we were not friends at the moment, but I couldn't let others talk like that
behind her back. I just couldn't. Just as I hadn't let people talk about Seth back then.

**********

"You ok?" Seth asked as we stood inside gorilla. New Day and Kevin had gone out to the ring
already, and we were waiting for our turn.

"Yeah, I'm fine." I was not, but I didn't want to talk about it here. He gave me a Look, like he
knew. "Not here, ok?"

"Fine. Later." He winced as he shifted his weight.

"Uh, are you ok?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Why?" I looked down at his knee. "Tch, don't worry. I'll survive the match."

"I need you to do a little more than survive the Survivor match, you jerk."

"Aawwww, dollface, you do car--" His music started. "Oh, time to go."

The walk out to the ring was one of arrogance and idiocy. Seth seemed to be of the opinion that
Roman couldn't find any teammates.

I had purposely not ferreted out the information, because first, I knew Seth would just drive me
nuts over it, and second, I had a sneaking suspicion on at least two members of Roman's team. I
was pleasantly surprised by the first entrance after Roman's, Jimmy and a newly returned Jey Uso.
"Looks like it's a night for people returning from injury," I said softly, smiling at Roman and
waving at the Usos. Roman blew me a kiss, which had Seth seething.

Ryback was the fourth man on Roman's team. Leaving only one spot left.

"C'mon..." I whispered. "Let me see those baby blues and pearly whites." A guitar riff sounded
over the speakers and Dean came out. "I knew it." Of the four men, I was reasonably certain
Jimmy and Dean would be on Roman's team. I would have included Jey as well if I had known he
had been cleared to compete again. "Ok," I said to Seth, "I'm out."

"What? No, no, no, no! You're staying here."

"Go fuck yourself, Rollins," I said cheerfully. "I have my brothers back, there is no way in hell I'm
standing against them already. And besides, if I stay ringside, there's a very good chance I'll be
cheering for them. Do you really want that in your corner?"

"But..." He looked over at Roman's team. "I need you..."

It was the way he said it that softened my resolve. "Rollins, you'll be fine. How about this? I'll sit
with commentary. But I make no promises on not cheering for Ro or Dee."

"Yeah, ok, fine... Try to not be too loud about it."

I grinned at him, but he only looked put out. "I'll try, ok?"

The match started well enough. Xavier was eliminated by Jey almost immediately. The rest of the
match was pretty standard, until it was down to two on two. Roman and Dean versus Seth and
Kevin. I had kept my promise of not cheering too loudly for Roman and Dean, but by this point, I had lost my joy for this match. Seth had been taunting Roman and Dean earlier, holding his fist out to each of them like we were still the Shield.

After a bit, Dean eliminated Kevin, and it was down to three. My three boys. My previous joy had now been replaced by a feeling of dread. Something was going to happen. I wanted to run away, but I couldn't. I just sat there. Would it have made a difference if I had? Seth was desperate. And the crowd was chanting *You sold out! You sold out! You sold out!* It really wasn't helping. Dean and Roman went after Seth, and I have to say, I'm proud that he fought back, but it was only for a bit. It didn't take long before he tried to escape into the crowd. Dean went after him, kept him from fully going over the barricade. Looking back now, I wish he had let him go. Maybe... just maybe, it would have changed things. Or maybe it would have been exactly the same. Who knows...

Seth reacted, of course. He was trying to get away and Dean was stopping him. It always seems to come down to the same response though. Or maybe it was my imagination again. Dean pulled Seth back into the ringside area, but Seth brought an accessory with him. A steel chair. I was on my feet the moment I realized, but I was too late to stop him. He hit Dean with all his might, ending the match in disqualification, and then hit Roman too, who was coming to help Dean pull Seth back in.

The third hit got me.

Seth's eyes went wide in terror as he realized that I had stepped in front of Dean and Roman to protect them. "Dollface..."

"Seth..." My vision was watery and I could hear my voice cracking. My left arm felt nothing but pain from where I had taken the chair shot. My legs were shaky and I felt myself beginning to fall down. "Please... don't..."

He dropped the chair, thankfully, and I found myself being scooped up. "I'm sorry," he whispered as he carried me away. Roman and Dean were long forgotten now. He whispered my name, and I heard the pain in his voice. No matter what happened between him, Roman, and Dean, at least I knew that Seth wouldn't sacrifice me to get to them.

**********

"Are you ok?" His match earlier was taking more of a toll on him than I expected. The paramedic team on site had cleared me to leave, though I was strongly urged to go to my own doctor for a follow up.

"What? Oh, yeah, I'm fine." Seth looked down at the ice packs on his knees. "Just needed to ice myself a bit, that's all. What about you? How's your arm?"

"I'll survive. Not broken or even fractured, thank goodness, just majorly bruised." I sat down next to him on the examination table in the trainer's room and leaned on his shoulder. My arm was swollen, but I had been given ibuprofen and an ice pack was strapped to it, plus it was in a sling to minimize the stress on it.

"Sorry..."

"It's fine. I should have... I shouldn't have been out there, shouldn't have gotten in the way..."

He slung his arm over my shoulders and kissed my forehead. "You belong with your brothers... but you belong with me as well. My beef with them never included you. I wanted..." He trailed off.
"What did you want?" I asked quietly.

He sighed. "I wanted things to be different. Maybe if they had… stuff like tonight could have been prevented. Which, by the way, we really need to talk about your compulsive need to jump into harm's way when it comes to Roman and Dean. Maybe even talk about what happened back then?"

I didn't want to talk about what had happened out there and I really didn't want to talk about the breakup of the Shield. I changed the topic and gestured to his knees. "You're going too hard again, aren't you? And hiding it from me." Wonder of wonders, he went with it. Maybe he was coddling me, or maybe he wasn't quite ready to cross that bridge yet either.

"Nothing I can't handle."

I snorted. "Clearly. That's why you're dragging and have been doing more recovery than usual. That does it. I'm pulling you from the live events this week. You're going to get some rest."

"Nonononono! I can't do that. I have a whole slew of things to do. Do your time management magic."

"That only works if I have things I can cancel or merge. And if you let me actually help you. You need rest." I looked up at him. "Come on. Let me do this for you."

"No. If you do, Hunter will fire you. Hell, he might fire me, champ or not. Just… Just do what you can. I can do this. I can handle it all."

I looked at him sadly. "Ok… but if anything happens…"

He gave me a squeeze. "As much as I enjoy you worrying about me, I'll be fine. I got this. Now tell me what was wrong earlier, from when we were talking before the match."

I sighed and began telling him about the stagehands. ^v^v^v^v

November 4, 2015

Sometimes, life just has a way of throwing you a curveball that you should have expected, but were hoping wouldn't come. That night at the live event in Dublin was one of those times. Seth wasn't even complaining about pain, saying he felt fine for the most part. A failed Sunset Flip in a match against Kane, and his knee… oh god… it had bent in a way it was not supposed to bend.

He was rushed to the doctor, and surgery was scheduled for when we returned to the States.

***********

I stayed at the hospital with him. His mom was flying in, but hadn't arrived just yet. Roman came by with Renee, dragging Dean along behind them.

“There’s not much to say,” I told them. “He’s still in surgery, but it seems to be going well?” They stayed for a bit, but had to get back for the Smackdown taping that night. I would have to join them eventually, but Stephanie had granted me a few days off, so long as I reported back to her and Hunter when I got back to work.

***********
“You look terrible,” I said softly, brushing back a wisp of hair from Seth's face. A WWE camera crew had just finished a short interview with him. Extremely short, since they only asked how he felt. He was still groggy from surgery as he looked up at me. His mom had left to get food from the cafeteria, his stepdad had stayed home to take care of things there.

“Dollface,” he croaked. He tried to reach up to touch my face, but his muscles were too tired from what his body had gone through. “You're a sight for sore eyes…”

“It's only been half a day since you saw me. And don't call me dollface,” I chided him, but I had no heat behind it. I held a cup of water to his lips for him to drink, making sure he only took tiny sips, so that he didn't accidentally choke on it.

“Why not… you used to love it…” He was reaching for my face again, his voice still harsh and raspy. I sighed and took pity on him. Sitting on the edge of his hospital bed, I took his hand and held it to my cheek, even though my arm still ached from that chair shot earlier in the week. It was worth it. His palm was rough, warm, and comfortable, if a little dry. His thumb stroked my cheekbone. "You were my girl… my doll…"

“I did like it, and I was… but… that was before…” I knew it would be hard to talk about it, though I never expected it to be under these circumstances. Forgiveness or not, I had not yet forgotten the pain I felt that day. “It was before we broke up.”

“We were dating?” he asked. "How did I manage to fuck that up?" He looked so very confused and adorable, I couldn't help but laugh.

“No, you weirdo. Those must be some really good meds you're on if you can't remember what I mean. I meant ‘we’ as in the Shield. Before the Shield broke up. I liked it when you called me your dollface…" I smiled, remembering how it had made me feel when he called me that. It was like I was the only one in the world, like I was someone special to him. "I liked it a lot. Now… now it just reminds me of what we had… of what we lost…” I removed his hand from my face, but kept it in my grasp. It was even more difficult to talk about what had happened than I expected. I wanted to keep smiling for him, to be positive, but just remembering was enough to take the sunshine away. My eyesight blurred a little. “You know how I felt about you then… everyone did. I… I even thought you might have returned my feelings, just a little bit, though I knew you wouldn't act on it. It made your… your betrayal all the harder to take.” I had to wipe away some tears. “And now… I can't hear your old nickname for me without remembering that pain again.”

“What…” He held onto my hands with his one, his grip suddenly strong. “Why… why did’n you mention it sooner?”

I shrugged. “You never asked and… It made it easier to work with you, a reminder of why I needed to be careful around you. At first, anyway. I sort of got used to it again after awhile, but it's never going to stop being a reminder. I thought if I kept telling you to stop calling me that, that maybe you would eventually listen.” I laughed despite my sadness. “You're a stubborn one.”

His grip lessened on my hands. “Imma jerk. Didn’t think... Was trying to make things like before… when it was good between us… Gotta come up with a new one then… babe.” His voice had dropped a little in volume, and his eyes were closing from sleepiness.

I laughed again. “You're an idiot. That’s what you call a girlfriend.”

“So? You’re better than one. You’re my girl, like Friday… that old movie… Besides… Gotta keep you happy, else you'll leave me again… can't have that…”
“You're the one that left us,” I reminded him, my voice gentle as I stroked the back of his hand.

He grunted and shook his head. “I left Roman and Dean. Had to sacrifice 'em to get ahead... but... you... you were supposed to stay with me... made a deal with Stephanie and Hunter... you were supposed to come, too…”

I watched him, stunned. “Is that why you asked me to wait outside the arena? You said you wanted to talk...”

“Yeah... wanted to explain... things were happenin' faster than I thought... thought you would be happy to stay with me... since you were crazy about me... we were going to take over... I realized later... after... that your ties to Roman and Dean were stronger, because there's two of them, only one of me, and I... I had ripped your heart out... when I... 'Course you stayed with them. I'm glad... now... now I'm glad... was angry then... They kept you safe... good brothers... Not sure I could have... I'm sorry, babe... should have kept you safe... you deserve safe...”

“Seth…”

"You shoud... shouda hated me... never wanted me again..."

"I never hated you, Seth. I was... scared. And I was... I was sad. Depressed. And angry. So very angry, for a long time, but I never hated you. Not even once. It might have been easier if I had."

“Yer too good…” He reached for my face again. I helped him, holding his hand to my cheek more firmly. "Too pure." I scoffed at that one. "Is why I got them to make you manager to the champion... I wanted you back with me... Knew I would get it... eventually... managed to get it same night you got told... We were gonna take over... me... and my girl...”

He had fallen back asleep and didn't see the tears that now flowed freely down my cheeks.

**********

Hunter visited briefly, but only to take the title back from Seth. My heart broke for him as he handed it over. Hunter spoke to me privately, reminding me to keep him and Stephanie in the loop. I imagined squishing his head until it popped as he walked away.

Zahra came by while I sat with Seth, reading a book at him while he slept. I thought it was useless, but he swore he could hear it in his dreams.

“Holly went out to check into a hotel, but she'll be back soon. She didn't want him to be alone.” Zahra didn't say anything. Her eyes were glued to Seth. "I'll be going then."

I wanted to kiss Seth on the forehead, but he was asleep anyway. He wouldn't notice I was gone.

**********

“How's Rollins doing, baby girl?” Roman asked when I got back on the road with the company. Stephanie had been pleased to hear that Seth would make a full recovery, provided he stick to his physical therapy.

Roman and Dean had invited me to work out with them. I felt pathetic with my lighter weights, but I easily beat them in cardio, so it was a draw overall.

“Are you asking because you really want to know or just to be polite?” I asked as I began my warm-up.
Roman scoffed. “When am I polite about him? Especially after what he did to us, to you, on that last Raw…”

I smiled sadly. “True. Fine, I'll tell you. He's alright. Well, he will be. The doctors are positive he'll make a full recovery. He just needs time.”

“Guessing Survivor Series is out… what about Wrestlemania?”

My smile fell. The event itself was five months away. Seth was scheduled to be out for closer to nine. “No… it's not likely that he'll be there this year, not to work anyway.”

**********

A tournament was held to determine who the next champion would be, despite the fact that Roman had won the right to be the number one contender. It wasn’t right, in my opinion, but I didn’t have the authority to challenge this decision. I held my breath through every round of it, and I was thrilled to see both Roman and Dean make it to the finals. They were scheduled to battle against each other at Survivor Series. I was ringside for it, cheering them both on.

Roman won the WWE Heavyweight Championship, only to lose it a little over five minutes later to Sheamus, who cashed in his Money In The Bank Contract. My heart broke for my brother, and I climbed into the ring to hug him as Sheamus walked away with his prize.

Chapter End Notes

I was not looking forward to this chapter, but at the same time, I couldn't wait for it.
I was with Seth as much as I could be, running myself ragged helping him get back on track while being Sheamus’s manager. Something Sheamus didn't appreciate.

“If I didn't know betta, I’d tink you didn't want ta be my manager,” he told me one day.

“It's not… I mean… it's just… Rollins is my friend. We have a complicated history, but I can't stand by and not help him. I am dedicated to you and your reign as champion, of course.” I wasn’t, but I was trying. I had my reputation to uphold, but sometimes it felt like I was just going through the motions. I always made sure that all of Sheamus's requirements were met, I just didn't go above and beyond like I would have done for Roman. Or how I had done for Seth.

“Hmph, as you say.”

I was never so grateful as I was when Roman won the title back from Sheamus on Raw, the night after TLC, even though Sheamus had retained the title at the pay-per-view.

Roman didn’t like how much time I spent with Seth either, but at least he understood. He just rolled his eyes when I stayed with Seth during the Slammy Awards. I couldn't say the same about Dean, who complained for weeks that I better not forget his birthday because of the traitor. Richard didn’t understand any of it, much to my chagrin.

^y^v^v^v^v^v

January 2016

“Babe, I don’t like how much time you’re spending with Seth. You should be here, with me,” Richard said one evening. Considering I was packing to go visit Seth for a quick visit before heading to the Royal Rumble, I could see his point, but we had been having the same argument since Seth had been hurt and I had heard this same speech at least a dozen times before.

“I've asked you not to call me that. And he’s one of my closest friends. My best friend,” I reminded him. “Plus he’s recovering from a major surgery, trying to get back on his feet.”

“The surgery happened two months ago! And he has a girlfriend to help him with that! Not you! You're my girlfriend, not his!” Richard exclaimed.

I sighed heavily. “This isn’t about who’s dating who--”

“Except that it is.” Richard sighed. “Look, babe… I… I love you, and I want to marry you someday.”

I whirled my head around to look at him. That was new. We hadn't been dating long enough for me to even consider that as part of our future!

"But I don’t see it happening as long as you’re friends with that guy. I know about Seth’s history with women. And let’s not forget about Roman and Dean. You are too close with them, to all three
of them, for me to not wonder if you're faithful to me."

“Well, that's a problem I can easily fix.” I glared at him. “Forgive me for putting my best friend and brothers, men I have know for years, before you, the man I've know for only a few months,” I snarled at him. "Now get out. You are no longer welcome here."

His face immediately softened. “Babe…”

“Don’t call me that. I have told you over and over again.” I was already at my wit's end with the Royal Rumble and the fact that not only was Roman defending his title in the Rumble match, something that had never been done before, he was also going to be the first man out there. Rich had been getting on my nerves a lot recently, as well.

"But it's a term of endearment!"

"I know it is! But I don't like it when you call me that!" I growled.

Richard threw his hands up in the air. “What is wrong with you?! I have been more than patient with you on this, but a guy can only take so much."

"Good thing you don't have to worry about that anymore because we are no longer dating," I said, pushing him towards the door. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have a plane to catch."

^v^v^v^v^v

February 2016

"So… New Day talking about Ambreigns, Tumblr, and writing their own fanfic. That happened."

I laughed. "That was definitely not what anyone expected them to say. Renee was ecstatic. You know how much it amuses her. Personally, I think Ambrolleigns is the best of the pairings." I giggled as he groaned. I loved to tease him about that, but hadn't had a chance to do so in forever.

"Ugh, I am not having a threeway with them just for your amusement." He fell silent for a few seconds. "Unless… there's a female fourth. I might be willing to share. Maybe… fuck, probably not…" He fell silent again.

"K… that's not a weird thing to say at all." He laughed nervously on the other end of the line. I smiled. "I've missed it though. Your weirdness." It had been a while since I had been able to talk to Seth, let alone see him. The half-day I had spent with him right before the Royal Rumble had been much too quick. It was really nice to hear his voice. It was even nicer to catch up with him and talk about all the funny, weird and random stuff that had happened at work. And things that happened outside of work. “I heard about what happened with Zahra. Or, you know, what’s been making the gossip rounds. You doing ok?” The rumors ranged from crazy to mundane, but they all said the same basic thing. Seth and Zahra had broken up.

“Yeah… I'm ok. It was… it was inevitable. Maybe even… maybe it was for the best. I mean…” He sighed into the phone. "You know what I mean, right?"

“Not really, but if it’s meant to be, she’ll be back in your life.” I smiled though he couldn’t see it. I was in my hotel, sitting on the bed, looking out at the grey sky and the city below. I missed hanging out with Seth so much, but I was trying to be positive, for both our sakes. “Or you can try and convince Stephanie to force her back into your life!”

“Hardy har har, you're a bucket of laughs,” he said dryly, but I could tell he was amused. I could
hearing his smile and I giggled. "You look good on the TV, babe. You keeping up with your training?"
I had refused to let Seth continue sparring with me while he was recovering, no matter how much
he improved.

"Yeah, I forgot to tell you. Roman and Dean have been training me. Well, more Dean than Roman,
but he'll spar with me on occasion."

"You kick his butt?"

"About as often as I kicked yours," I said.

"Nice. Good to know you don't have as much trouble against him as you did with me. Damn, I can't
wait until we can start up again. I gotta say, you're one of my favorite opponents."

"Shut up." I was blushing. He was my favorite to spar against, too. "But seriously, you're going to
be ok to spar? Mentally as well as physically?"

"Wild horses couldn't keep me from sparring with you. I'm going to make you wriggle defenselessly
underneath me until you tap out."

The imagery in my head was not PG at all, and I switched the subject, my face going from the
warm blush to burning with embarrassment. "You heard about Daniel Bryan, right?" Daniel had
announced his retirement earlier in February. Daniel and Seth had worked on the indy scene
together, running in the same circles. Despite the differences they had had there and in WWE,
there was a certain amount of respect Seth held for the man, especially since he was going through
recovery now.

"Yeah… I gave Daniel a call when I saw his tweet. He'll be fine, somehow. He's got his wife, a
good support system. And I'm fine. But I'll be better if you come visit me again and nurse me back
to health. I'm still pretty limited in what I can do at the moment. Kevin misses you, too, you know."

"I'll do what I can, Rollins. I'm still figuring out how I'm supposed to manage for Hunter. My life
has been a roller coaster ever since he won the title from Roman at the Rumble. It's a whole lot of
hurry up and wait with him, since he has a small army at his beck and call. I don't see a reason I'm
still assigned to him besides my contract. But… I really miss you guys, so I guess I'll brave the big
bad boss and get over to Iowa. Probably won't happen until after Fastlane, just to warn you. Roman
and Dean are going against Brock Lesner in that triple threat match. They need me around for that,
and… Hunter is insisting I be there as well, even though he technically doesn't have a match. I
think he wants to be around to mess with whoever wins the triple threat. If it's Roman or Dean, he's
likely just using my presence to get under their skin."

"Probably. Boss man has issues. Stay safe. I need you here in one piece. And thanks, babe. You're
the best."

^v^v^v^v^v^v^v

March 2016

"Babe, you made it!" Seth said, hugging me tightly in greeting. He was seated in a wheelchair, his
knee wrapped like a mummy. He could walk on his own power, but he was supposed to rest it for
several hours a day or something. Kevin was barking excitedly, scrambling around our feet.

"Let me go! I have to greet my favorite guy!" I giggled, pushing him away. Seth growled as I
picked up Kevin and gave him kisses.
“Damnit, Kev. You’re supposed to be my wingman, not stealing the girls.”

“Aawwww, Kevin my heaven, never change. Who’s my good boy? Who’s my good boy??” His tail started going nuts. ME! I’M YOUR GOOD BOY! I rewarded him with more kisses.

“So… how long are you able to stay for?” he asked, making faces at Kevin, who in turn licked Seth’s nose.

“A week this time. I have to be back for the Roadblock pay-per-view.” I wished I could visit Seth every weekend, if I could manage it. I really hated being Hunter’s manager and I couldn’t wait until someone unseated him. Hunter knew this, and only seemed amused. He had me doing a lot of things that he normally had stagehands doing. All I could do was grit my teeth and bear it. Soon. Someone will step up soon to take that crown off his head.

Roman was working hard to regain the title. He had earned the number one contendership at Fastlane and was going up against Hunter at Wrestlemania. Dean was up for a shot at being added to the title match as well, if he won his match at the next PPV, but for the moment, I had to cater to Hunter’s whims, when he was around. Thankfully, he still had corporate work to do, so I was left with more free time than I usually had. Plus, now that Richard and I had broken up, I didn’t have to worry about going home just to see him. “Think you can stand having me around that long?” I tickled Kevin’s tummy, cuddling him like a baby. “I know you want me around all the time! ‘Cause I baby you, and give you nummies.”

Seth laughed. “Yeah, and then he loses the weight once you’re gone by being sad and not eating. You should just stick around all the time.”

Kevin was looking up at me with such sad eyes. Please stay! Give me nummies! I’m a good boy! “Oh, sweetie, I would if I could,” I told Kevin. “But, Auntie has to work, just like your daddy, once he gets cleared for action again.”

“Hey, I get plenty of action-- Oh, you meant in the ring… Whoops.” Seth stuck his tongue out.

I watched him, giving him a look. I wanted to ask how he was doing in regards to his breakup the previous month, but at the same time, I knew he probably didn’t want to talk about it. That, and I didn’t want to know if there had been any rebounds.

“What?” he asked. I finally let Kevin down, though he continued to run around us, jumping on our legs and finally managing to get into Seth’s lap.

“You’re an idiot.” Seth scowled at me, but I ignored him as I blew kisses at Kevin. “Come on, sweetie. Let’s go unpack and then we can beat your daddy in some games!”

“You wish!” Seth called after me.

**********

“Let’s see… that makes four wins for Kevin and me,” I said, writing another mark on the notepad on the coffee table. “And… I’m sorry, how many wins have you had, Rollins?” I asked sweetly.

Seth rolled his eyes at me. "You are such a sore winner." He got up gingerly from the couch. "I'm gonna grab some more coffee, you want any?"

"Yes, please." I scratched at Kevin's chin.

"So how's work going?" he called out from the kitchen.
"Good. More or less. One thing I miss about you being champion, the stability. By hook or by crook, you kept the championship, but in the last four months, there have been as many title holders." I sighed. "Like I said, it's been a roller coaster and I don't like it one bit. You better get it back when you return."

"You doubt I will?" He handed me a mug of coffee.

"Of course not," I said with a snort. "Because I'll kick your ass if you don't."

He smiled and sat down with his mug. Kevin perked up and sniffed in the direction of it. "It's too hot right now, bud. Maybe in a bit."

"Don't give him coffee, he'll be up all night."

"It's just a little caffeine. And what if I'm going up against Roman? Or Dean? He's about to take on Hunter for the title, isn't he? At the Roadblock pay-per-view, you said?"

I nodded and sipped at my coffee. "Yeah… I will definitely be rooting for Dee and against Hunter. Silently. I don't want to hear another lecture from Stephanie."

Seth put his arm around me and pulled me to his side. "She bugging you?"

"A bit… She's all off kilter since Shane's return, which throws me off kilter… It's a very confusing mess." Shane McMahon, Stephanie's older brother, had shown up on Raw the previous month, in the middle of Mr. McMahon's award presentation to Stephanie, the Legacy of Excellence Award. "But… and if you repeat this to anyone, I will deny it… but yeah, even if you have to go up against Roman or Dean, you better win it back. I won't help you do that, but I won't be upset if you did take it back from one of them. I love them to pieces, but… if I'm going to be anyone's manager, I'd rather be yours." I felt my cheeks warm considerably at the admission. "I think… haven't been with them as WWE Champion manager to know, really, and--"

"Aawww, babe." He kissed my forehead. "Gonna stop you right there. That's possibly the sweetest thing I've ever heard."

"Yeah, well, I had to say something nice after kicking your butt all afternoon," I said, trying to hide my blush.

He growled at me. “That’s it, we’re playing Madden.”

“Haha, no, we are not.”

“Why not?” he asked, frowning.

“Because I barely know it and you've won a freaking tournament of it! Twice! At least these are games we have similar levels of experience with,” I said, pointing at the fighting games in front of us. "Talk about not being fair."

“Well, you could learn it, you know. Got lots of time… and… it could be fun?”

I stared at him. “You just want me to learn how to play so you can have someone other than the computer or the online people to play against, don’t you?”

“Pretty much, yeah.” At least he looked guilty. “No one here wants to play with me and this year's version doesn't have online play.”
“That's because you're too good at it, and maybe it will next year, but fine,” I said with a sigh. “And you owe me pizza. With toppings I like.”

He grinned, happy to have won the argument. “You got it, babe.”

**********

I tried to visit Seth every chance I had. A day here, a weekend there. He wasn’t without things to do in his own life, but it was fun to just hang out with him. It was really nice to be able to be just friends with him again. No manager/champion dynamics, just two buddies hanging out. His mom joked that I should just move in with him if I was going to be over so often anyway. Truthfully, I hadn't been to my own apartment in nearly a month, but I just couldn't say no to Seth when he invited me over.

We ended up playing video games most weekday evenings, and a lot of those were Madden, which annoyed me at first, but then I started to get into it. I even won a few times, but Seth was still The Champ at it. I’m also not entirely certain he didn’t let me win those times. Whatever, it was still fun. On weekends, if a band he liked was playing, he treated me to live shows in town or in Chicago, which was just the best. I didn't always like the music, but it was always a good time to just be with him.

^v^v^v^v^v

April 9, 2016

His mom called me, begging me to come see him. "Seth… he's not doing well. He hasn't responded to anyone in almost a week! I've checked on him, of course, so I know he's alive, but he's shut himself off from the world! Please, will you come? I know he'll listen to you, or at least you'll be able to get to him, somehow."

"I'll be on the next plane out," I promised. She told me she would leave a key under the mat for me.

As the cab pulled away from the hotel, I sent a text to Roman, letting him know something had come up and that I'd be back as soon as I could. I didn't want him trying to stop me from going. I knew he'd be fine without me for at least a few days. Unlike Seth or Sheamus, Roman didn't let me do as much as his manager. Hunter had been similar, but that was more understandable since he had a small army at his beck and call. It was a little insulting from Roman, but I hesitated to bring it up to him. Several hours and a plane ride later, another cab was dropping me off at Seth's house. It was early evening, and the lights should have been on, but the house looked almost abandoned. One lone light in the living room, that was it, and a shadowy figure laying on the couch that had to be Seth. I pounded on the door, but he didn't answer. I ended up using the key Holly had left, and when I got inside, I found him in a funk. A literal funk, since it smelled like he hadn't bathed in a while.

It was too dark, so I flipped on the lights and that's when I saw the destruction. The tv was smashed beyond repair on the floor, the poker for the fireplace laying near it. Picture frames that had been hanging on the wall were on the floor. Any glass from them had been cleaned up, probably Holly's doing. A lot of things looked like they had been damaged and then cleaned up, though there was just so much.

“Oh my god… Rollins, what the hell happened?”

“Roman…” Seth said. “He won…”
“Wait… you did all this? Did you… Did you do that when it happened?” Roman had won the championship before, but this time it had been at Wrestlemania 32. That had been only a week ago… and also a year since Seth had first won the championship. I could see why this one would have hit him harder than the other times. So if he had been like since then…

“Yeah… couldn't control myself… I was at the arena. Did you know?” I hadn't known. I thought he had been at home. "I wanted to surprise you… but couldn't find you, went to the VIP suite… the match was starting… I sat there… watched it happen… Then as soon it was over, I left. I don't even remember the trip back… Came home… picked up the poker and… just… just… wham…” It was obviously a lot more than just one shot, but I let that slide.

“Seth…” I knelt in front of him, “Seth, look at me.” He did, but he wasn't seeing me, more like he was looking through me. His beard was wild, unkempt, his hair a tangled, greasy mess. “What do you need?”

“I don't know…”

I touched his cheek, ignoring the oily feel. “Yes, you do. Tell me. What do you need?” He looked so broken as he returned my gaze.

“I need… I need my life back. I need to be whole…” He looked down at his hands. “The New Day came by… all three of them. Assholes. Just reminded me of what I no longer am… Left me some VHS tapes… Can you believe them?”

I shook my head as I stood back up. “Sounds about right. Their collective heart was in the right place, but they can be annoying. Come on, let's get you cleaned up.” Seth made no move to comply. I grabbed his face with one hand and made him look up at me, which put him at an awkward angle since he was still lying on his stomach. “Ok. I'm going to say this once and only once. You've had a week to wallow, but now that I'm here, that pity party is over. You are Seth fucking Rollins, and you do not give up. You do not go quietly into that night and you most certainly do not let something like someone else having the title get to you. You never lost that championship. It was taken from you by a cruel twist of circumstances. You will win it back, on your own terms, on your own merit, and I will be there to see it happen. Now get the fuck over to the bathroom and bathe or shower or something, because you really fucking stink.”

Seth blinked, the cloudy look in his eyes starting to clear up. “Babe…”

Kevin peeked out from behind the sofa where he had been asleep. Shaking himself, he ran up to greet me, begging to be picked up. At least he seemed to be taken care of. Even in his darkest of moods, Seth would never abandon his dog. With Kevin in my arms, I looked at Seth with a grin. “We've got a lot of work ahead of us, baby. You're in for a world of torment and tough love.”

**********

Once Seth and his house were somewhat cleaner, I cooked a simple dinner. I made calls to a professional cleaning service to come by the next day, as well as to Holly, to let her know Seth had more or less rejoined the civilized world. I was expecting her to show up some time after we finished eating.

“Babe, this is really good,” Seth said, slurping up the noodles.

“I'm glad.” I made a plate for myself and joined him at the table.

“Isn't this…” Seth chewed thoughtfully. “Isn't this what you used to make for us? Back when we
first started the Shield?"

“You remember,” I said, smiling to myself. “Yeah, spaghetti-ramen special. It was all you had in
the pantry. I don't have a lot of recipes to draw on, but the ones I do have--”

“Are always delicious,” Seth insisted. "I mean that. Even when we were on the road with just a hot
plate and camping cookware." 

I was feeling a little bashful from the praise. “Hey, what do you want to do after dinner?” I asked to
change the subject.

Seth looked up. “Madden?”

“Nope. You broke the TV. Try again.” I took a sip of water as he thought. “When was the last time
you went to your wrestling school? Went to see Marek or your parents?” I asked. “And physical
therapy?”

“Oh… It’s been… more than a week. I guess… we could go see them?”

“Good answer,” I said. “Your mom is already on her way, but still, good answer. We’ll pick up a
new TV tomorrow. And physical therapy? When did you last go?”

“Oh, uh… been about the same. I’ll… make an appointment immediately.” He reached for his
phone.

“Very good. We can play Madden tomorrow after we get the TV.”

“You’re using a reward system?” he said as he listened to the ringing on the phone. “I’m not a little
kid, you know.”

I shrugged, hiding my smile. “I guess we can skip the TV buying and the video games then.”

“Hey now, let’s not get ahead of ourselves-- Oh, hi, Nurse Kyle, this is Seth. Seth Rollins? Yeah…
I need to reschedule an appointment that I missed this past week…” I smiled as I listened to him.

**********

I spent a full two weeks with Seth. Roman didn't like it, but he kept his opinions on it to a
minimum, just warning me to be careful. Dean did not do the same, and threatened to come kidnap
me a few times. I reminded him that I was more than capable of putting up a fight now, and that
Seth's mom was watching out for me. That calmed him down until the next time he got a bug up
his butt about it. That usually took about three or four days. Seth was still a grump at times, but he
changed his tune quick when I slapped him or threw ice water on him.

We got him a new tv, and for the hell of it, a VCR from a pawn shop. He wanted to see what was
on the tapes New Day had left for him and since it was the last night of my visit, I figured it was
now or never if I wanted to see them, too.

“It's probably porn.”

I rolled my eyes. We were seated on his couch, popcorn and pretzel bowls in between us, and were
about to watch the mystery tapes. “You would think that. What if it's My Little Pony, the 80s
series?”

“I'd rather watch paint dry.”
I smacked his arm. “Jerk.”

He grinned. “Just put the tape in already, brat.”

I stuck my tongue out at him and put the first tape in. The old logo popped up. “Oh, wow… It’s... Wrestlemania 24. That's the one with…” That was the one with Shawn Michael's match with Rick Flair, the match that retired Rick, and a favorite of Seth's. I looked over at him and smiled. He was completely focused on the television, his eyes taking on that old sparkle.

Chapter End Notes

I drew on a mix of things, including the Network special of Seth's road to recovery and the comic books from Boom. As previously said, I have never met Colby Lopez, nor have I met his family or friends. The characterizations I have of them in this story are simply what I imagine them to be like, and are probably not accurate.
May 2016

I was looking down at my phone as we walked through the airport. Roman was to my left and a little behind, but that was fine. Hunter was almost directly behind me, which was less fine, but whatever. There was apparently an issue for an interview the next morning, and my contact at the radio station was only just now messaging me.

I was looking through the email when I walked into a very solid mass of muscle. “Oh, I’m so sorry-” I stared straight ahead at a very familiar chest. My eyes glided up. “Se--? Seth!” I squealed and jumped into his arms. He laughed and hugged me, nuzzling my cheek with his. His familiar cinnamon scent was something I had missed. I hadn't been able to go visit him since my impromptu two week vacation. Hunter had denied all my requests since then, saying that by taking off without prior approval, I was lucky I hadn't been suspended. He had a point, but I still hated it.

“Seth… this is… unexpected,” Hunter was saying behind me. I let go of Seth, embarrassed that so many of our coworkers had seen my reaction, but didn't leave his side. Roman raised an eyebrow at me, but he seemed amused.

“Hunter, hey. I'm not trying to step on any toes here, just wanted to show you the new me. I'm still waiting to get cleared by medical, but I'm back, better than ever, ready to take on the challenge.” The other superstars around us laughed at Seth's brazen attitude.

Roman scoffed. “You'll never be ready to take me on, little brother.”

Seth growled at Roman, but I squeezed his arm. “Not the time or place, Seth,” I whispered. “Play nice.”

“Nice? He can't play nice to get what he wants,” Hunter said derisively. “But, he can't play at all until I say so. And right now? I don't. But I will let you know as soon as I can. Goodbye, Seth. You," he pointed at me, "keep moving. We have a plane to catch.”

The rest of the group moved on. Roman stood back, allowing me space to speak with Seth. "You've only got a few minutes," he warned me, then stepped away to give us some privacy.

“It's good to see you,” I told Seth. “It was bold to show up like this.”

“But…?” he prompted. I gave him a small smile.

“But, also a bit reckless. Hunter is still pissed he lost to Roman at Wrestlemania and he's been forbidden from messing with him since losing his rematch. Mr. McMahon realized the feud between them was hurting business more than helping it. You should have called me, or texted.”

Seth pushed a loose lock of hair behind my ear. “I had other reasons for showing up unannounced.”

“Like?”

He grinned at me. “Not telling.”
“Jerk.”

“You know it, babe.”

"To think I missed you…” I hugged him tightly. "And since I probably won't be able to see you on the actual day, happy early birthday."

"Thanks… I missed you, too…” he whispered and kissed my forehead. "You better get going. Call me when you get to the hotel? You can fill me in on all the backstage gossip."

“Sure, Rollins.” I kissed his cheek and returned to Roman.

**********

“You're happy.”

“Hmmm?” I asked, looking over at Roman. The fasten seatbelt sign had been turned off, but I had yet to get up. I was actually enjoying the flight. “Of course I'm happy. Why wouldn't I be?”

He shrugged. “Just haven't seen you like this since… well, since Payback 2014… the night of, I mean.”

I gave him a sad smile. “Not a lot to be happy about at that time. It was a battlefield, a war between the Shield and Evolution. But I was happy. I had my two brothers, Rollins was my friend, and you three had just won against Hunter, Randy and Batista. We were at an all time high, despite the bickering, and before Seth… before he put that chair through your back.”

He laughed. “Yeah. What a difference a day makes. We had each other. But now… you're happy for a different reason. You're in love with Seth. Have been for a while now.”

My eyes widened and I quickly looked around. No one seemed to be paying attention to us. “What?! No!” I hissed. "He's my… He's my best friend, that's all! I am not--"

"Baby girl, I know love when I see it. And you? You're in deep.”

I swallowed hard. I knew I had feelings for him still, that I loved him, but being in love? “No… I can't be in love with him… he doesn't… he doesn't feel the same about me.”

“Maybe… maybe not. Who knows what goes through his head. But you… I get it. I do,” Roman said. “He's not exactly the ideal man to fall for. Just make sure he doesn't use your feelings against you. Again. It's not the same as it once was. The consequences are higher now.”

“I know,” I whispered. “I won't.” Truthfully, I didn't believe Seth had ever tried to do that, not if what he told me after his surgery was true. I hadn't told anyone about that conversation. I wasn't even sure Seth remembered telling me. It was too much, and I understood so little. All I really knew was that if I was in love with Seth, I was royally screwed.

**********

The chime of my text messages woke me in the middle of the night. Roman was asleep in the next bed, snoring away like nothing was going on. Bleary eyed, I reached for my phone and saw Seth had sent me a photo. I opened it and promptly dropped my phone, my face burning with embarrassment. What the HELL?! Why did he send me that??

I gingerly picked up the phone as if it would bite me, and took a second look. Maybe I had been
mistaken? I had just woken up, and-- nope! It was what I thought it was. I read the accompanying message.

SR: hey sexy, like what tou see?

I groaned. I did. A lot. Even if he was terrible at photography. But I knew it must have been a mistake.

Me: Go to fucking bed Rollins. You’re drunk

SR: am not. proove it.

Me: Are too. PROOF: Misspelling stuff AND you're sending dick pics. TO ME.

Three little dots popped up. Disappeared. Then popped up again. It took a few more times before he actually sent a message. I took that time to delete the image. I have to admit, I almost didn't. One of these days, he was going to kill me just by being him.

SR: oops? ok, so i drank a little… i needed it. sue me. not drunk. my head is cleer. besides, you didn't call like promised

I shook my head.

Me: riiiiiight. Just a LITTLE. sorry about not calling, we got in really late. i figured you'd be asleep already. anyway, don't worry about the pic. Already deleted it. And FYI. Might want to look up information on how to take a good dick pic though. Low angles are more flattering for that sort of thing, if I recall correctly.

SR: are you saying I take bad dick pics?!?! >:(

Me: jeez… just… kind of? you're not particularly good at photography in general…

SR: why didn't you tell me last time!?!?

I could only assume he meant the leaked photos.

Me: uh, because we weren't talking at the time? You can't see this, but I'm raising an eyebrow at you. Also, I never looked at those so I didn't know.

SR: … what?

Me: we weren't talking at the time, remember? I mean, that was during the nine months between the Shield breakup and me becoming your manager.

SR: No, not that, the looking part. Not even a peek?

Me: Oh. Yeah. Never looked at them. Actively avoided them.

SR: you did? why????

He was really starting to irk me. I angrily double tapped the shift key so I could yell at him in all caps.

Me: BECAUSE IT FELT LIKE AN INVASION OF YOUR PRIVACY, YOU JACKHOLE!
SR: :O

I sighed and shifted back to regular capitalization.

Me: Why would I look at something THAT personal you meant for someone else? -_- but I'm sorry, I shouldn't have yelled. I'm tired. You woke me up.

SR: it's ok. you weren't yelling that much but i AM a jackhole. I can send you more pics? Just for you. An apology. :D

Me: … fuck you. I'm going back to sleep.

SR: but how can you fuck me if you're asleep? :D :D :D

Me: Rollins, so help me, I WILL sic Roman on you if you don't stop. You know how he is when he's woken up in the middle of the night.

SR: aawwww :(

Me: just go to bed Rollins. And stop drinking whatever the hell you drank tonight!

SR: ooooooookkcccckkkkkaayyy :(

He really was going to be the death of me.

Chapter End Notes

I laughed way too much while writing this chapter.
Me: Omg, Rollins. WHAT. I’m a little busy right now. Dean is in the middle of this IDIOTIC asylum match that he set up with Chris Jericho, and I feel like I’m going to have a heart attack every other punch. I HATE EXTREME RULES.

SR: Do you miss me?

Me: That’s why you’re texting me?! I’m going to hurt you

SR: Nah, you punch like a 5yrold.

Me: I pinch like a crab though.

SR: :( 

I sighed, smiling a little. I was really stressing out over Dean’s match, and Seth was providing a nice distraction. Roman was off in his own world, preparing mentally for his title match against AJ Styles, a wrestler who had debuted at the Royal Rumble pay-per-view back in January. It was his second title shot against Roman, and I honestly didn't feel he had really earned it, but Roman was determined to show everyone that he could and would answer all challenges to the title.

I was feeling a bit lonely, and missed how Seth liked to chat and interact with me before his matches. Add to that, Hunter had ordered more security at the last minute and a blackout on all phones. I wasn't in the loop on the details, but it sounded like they were trying to keep someone out. Whoever it was had evaded everything thrown at them. And caused a minor flood in one of the bathrooms. Seth would have found it all highly entertaining if he was there. Shit. I did miss him.

Me: Ugh. FINE. Yes, I miss you. Happy? I haven't seen you in a while…

SR: :) I knew it.

Me: Jerk

SR: You like it. Come see me after. I got you a present. And it's not the last of the blond streak. There's only an inch of that left, btw. Maybe less.

Me: Thank goodness, because I don't want hair clippings, you weirdo. And as much as I like presents, I can’t take the time to go visit you right now. Still being punished for that two
weeks I spent with you. I’ll see what I can do though, ok?

SR: I guess I’ll have to live with it. How you doing? How's work? Roman's a harder champion to work for than me, right?

Me: :P Ro is an angel compared to you. But work's ok. You have no idea how much things have changed since you had to leave.

SR: I'll find out eventually. So… what’s the venue like?

Me: Kinda weird. I mean, it’s a normal stadium/arena, but there’s all this extra security and HHH is being so freaking STRICT. Technically, I’m not even supposed to be using my phone right now.

SR: Such a rebel

Me: Shut up.

SR: :)
Hey, that AJ guy... he’s kind of a dick. Can’t believe he’s got a title shot tonight… again.

Me: Mmhmm. Yeah, kind of reminds me of someone I know. I WONDER WHO THAT COULD BE.

SR: :( so mean to me. Your poor injured Sethie-poo

Me: Idiot. Like I’d ever call you that. Plus, you're not injured anymore. Recovering very nicely.

SR: :) I'm like wolverine. I wouldn’t object to you giving me a nickname since you still call me ROLLINS. :( :( Tho though if you do, make it a manly nickname, since i’m THE MAN

I rolled my eyes, but I was smiling.

Me: Says “The Man” who just called himself Sethie and POO. Anyway, I should get going. Have to get ready for Roman’s match. He wants me at ringside.

SR: Hey… Gimme a kiss for good luck.

Me: How? A digital kiss?

SR: Yeah? Or send me a photo of you blowing me a kiss.

I looked around. No one was paying attention to me. I felt incredibly foolish, a blush spreading across my cheeks, but I typed in my response.

Me: Fine.

SR: :D

I made a very short video, not even five seconds long. I looked awful, but I didn’t have the courage to redo it.
Me: There. One awkwardly done video of a blown kiss. You better have a fantastic day tomorrow at rehab. AND YOU BETTER DELETE THAT.

I only half meant that last part.

SR: Thanks, babe. I’m ready to conquer the world now. Keeping it forever in case I need luck when you’re not around. Now, I got some idiots to dodge.

I had no idea what he could mean by that.

Me: You're so weird.

**********

I held my breath as Roman pinned AJ, finally getting the three count. The crowd was mixed in their reaction, half booing, half cheering. I was ecstatic, of course, jumping up and down. Movement caught my attention. Someone’s running down the ramp-- OH MY GOD!

I completely forgot how to breathe as I watched Seth skid into the ring, surprising Roman with a Pedigree, and then standing victorious over him, holding the championship belt high above his head. The crowd was going wild, but all I saw was him turn to me and wink.

**********

“Ow, babe, you're cutting off my circulation,” Seth complained, but he was hugging me just as tightly. We were backstage. I had gotten Roman to medical, just to be on the safe side, and Seth had found me while I waited. "Guessing you like your present. The gift of my presence."

“Shut up. It feels like I haven't seen you in forever."

"You saw me at the airport a few weeks ago," he pointed out.

I snorted. "Yeah, but it was only for a few minutes. I missed you, you jerk."

Seth went a little rigid but he hugged me just a little tighter and kissed the top of my head. “Missed you, too.”

I pulled out my phone and took a selfie of the two of us. We looked really happy.

"What's that about?" Seth asked. He had posed without even questioning it.

"Nothing," I said, but later, I planned to make it my phone's new lock screen.

"Fine, but now it's my turn." He took out his phone as well and opened the camera app. Wrapping his arm around my shoulders and bending down a little so we were both in the frame, he asked, "Ready?" I smiled and nodded. "'K… one, two… three." The resulting picture missed out on my look of surprise, but perfectly caught Seth's kiss to my cheek.

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Raw - May 23, 2016

I stood in the ring, a microphone in my hand. It was my first time opening the show by myself, and I was excited for the reason why. “Welcome! To Monday Night Raw!” The crowd cheered, slowly building into a chant calling for Seth.
We want Rollins! Clap clap, clap clap clap. We want Rollins! Clap clap, clap clap clap.

Smiling, I raised the mike. “Settle down, please.” It took a few moments, but they eventually calmed down. “Thank you. I know everyone is excited—”

We want Rollins! Clap clap, clap clap clap. We want Rollins! Clap clap, clap clap clap.

“Well! Then what are we waiting for!? I said happily. The crowd roared in response. “As the former manager to Seth Rollins, I have been asked to—” Seth's music hit, interrupting me. I rolled my eyes, but I was still smiling. Seth swaggered down the ramp and into the ring. A stagehand gave him a microphone, but he didn't say anything just yet. The crowd was too wild.

Kiss him! Kiss him! the crowd began to chant, but it was soon drowned out by Thank you, Rollins! referring to his Pedigree on Roman the previous night. I swear, the crowd was simultaneously my favorite and least favorite thing about this job. Rollins was thoroughly enjoying the welcome back.

“You heard them, babe. I need a welcome back kiss,” Seth said, out of range of the mike, but he leaned down and tapped his cheek. The crowd went nuts for it. I rolled my eyes and kissed his scruff.

“There! Happy?” I said into the mike. The crowd cheered. “Ok, now that that is out of the way, I would like to say, welcome back, Rollins. The WWE Universe is happy to see you.”

“And you?”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “I will neither confirm nor deny,” I said with a smirk. The crowd laughed at that.

Seth cackled and clapped his hands in applause. “Nice one. Sorry about the interruption, just wanted to get out here already. Well, I would like to say… it’s been a while! I mean, two hundred days… two hundred days… For seven months, I have been waiting to come back, to step back in this ring, to reclaim the title that I never lost, and last night… Well, last night I made sure Roman knew exactly what my intentions are.”

The crowd cheered and started chanting Thank you, Rollins! again. Jerks…

“Wow… did… did you guys actually miss me or something?” Seth asked incredulously.

I wasn’t holding my mike up, so only he could hear me say, “It would seem so. Don’t be too much of a dick, Rollins.”

He grinned at me, and I just knew he was about poke at the crowd. I sighed and leaned against the ropes. It would be entertaining, of that I was sure.

“You know, that’s… That’s actually kind of funny to me,” he started, his eyes on me, but then he turned to address the audience. “See… when I put a steel chair through Roman Reigns’ back… you weren’t cheering then. And when I joined the Authority, you definitely weren’t cheering then.” The crowd started to boo. “Yeah, just like that, every time I came out here and did what I do best, you guys booted me. You called me a coward, the weakest champion in the history of WWE champions, that I hid behind the Authority… I mean, you disrespected me and all the hard work I put into my title reign. Then… Then something happened.”

He stopped talking, standing absolutely still as he stared at a spot on the mat. I could see the vein in his forehead pulsating a bit. He was angry. Not that I could blame him. The crowd that had once called for his head had changed their tune when he got hurt. It smacked of insincerity, and while
the positive energy towards him was nice, it was also more than a little rude if you looked at the big picture. I suppose the old adage of “absence makes the heart grow fonder” was appropriate for the situation.

“My knee… It buckled from carrying this company on my back, something none of you can ever truly understand!” I couldn't refute that one. Even I only understood parts of what Seth had gone through. "Only one person stood by me, and for that, I am forever grateful, but the rest of you…" His lip curled up in a sneer. “I am back for one thing, my WWE World Heavyweight Championship, the title I did not lose. I don’t need any of you. I rebuilt myself. I redesigned myself, and I will reclaim my title on my own--”

Roman’s music interrupted him. I climbed up to sit on the top rope as Roman came down to challenge Seth. The two traded barbs at each other, Seth taunting Roman to come into the ring, but once he did, Seth stepped out and walked around.

“We’re not on Roman time right now,” he said. “We go when I say we go. Last night? That was the first shot!”

“What’s the matter, Rollins?” I chirped at him from my perch. He glared at me, but I could only smile back. “You want the title back, don’t you?”

“Don’t start with me, babe,” he growled. I hopped down to stand next to Roman.

“Did he just call you ‘babe’?” Roman asked me.

“I was promoted from ‘dollface’,” I told him. “I'm pretty certain I mentioned this awhile ago.” I hadn't, but I was embarrassed about it and Roman would play it off whether he realized the truth or not.

“Must have forgotten. Anything involving little brother is forgettable.”

“Ouch. Well, I’ll remind you, should you forget again,” I told him.

“Hey! I’m right here!” Seth complained.

Here comes the MONEY! We all turned as Shane’s music hit, and the boss man walked out and down to the ring.

“Oh dear…” I said. “Dad’s coming out to deal with the misbehaving children.”

Shane entered the ring, doing that funny shuffle dance he liked to do. Seth was cautious as he re-entered the ring at Shane’s invitation. "Come on in, Rollins. I'll protect you from the big dog," I said sweetly.

He sneered at me, but stepped inside. Shane greeted Seth cordially, and then listed the shots fired from Seth to Roman. The betrayal of the Shield. Taking the Money In The Bank contract. Using said contract to insert himself in Roman's Wrestlemania match against Brock Lesner. Shane had a point there. "And now, returning to work, wanting to take back the title he never lost, well… Gotta say, Roman, you have to understand his point of view here."

"Oh, I understand it," Roman growled. "And I'm ready to defend my title."

"Well, I have the solution," Shane said, grinning at both of them. He didn't continue for several moments.
"Shane," I said, "It's best not to keep them in suspense. They're not patient men in this kind of situation."

"Oh, right, I guess you would be the expert here. Ok, so the best solution is the easiest as well. At the next pay-per-view event, Money In The Bank, it will be Roman Reigns defending the WWE Heavyweight Title against Seth Rollins." The crowd roared their approval as Seth thanked Shane profusely for such a wise decision.

"They're so fickle," I muttered. An arm was draped over my shoulders, but Seth wasn't looking at me. He was looking straight at Roman as he held onto me.

"Start counting down the days, big dog," he said, grinning from ear to ear. "I'm taking back my title and my manager."

**********

"So, let's see, you don't have a match tonight, but I figured you'd want to see Dean's qualifying match against Ziggler."

Roman was so quiet, I don't think he heard me.

"Ro?"

"Oh, sorry. I was just thinking… What did you say? Dean has a match?"

I smiled at him. "Yeah. Against Dolph. You wanna stay to watch or do you wanna head out early?"

"I think you know the answer to that." He was smiling.

"Right, I'll let Dean know." He always liked to know when we were able to watch.

**********

Sami won the first MITB qualifying match against Sheamus. I gave him a high five as I passed him in the hallway. Cesaro won his as well, against Miz. Ok, four more to go tonight, I thought as I made notes in my tablet.

**********

I hid in the shadows as Renee interviewed Seth. He must have been stung by a bee because his head had swollen to five times its usual arrogance levels. I laughed to myself as he spoke to Renee, so assured that he would win over Roman. It's gonna be a hell of a match, Seth, but don't count Ro out yet.

Seth became distracted and wandered away from Renee, who looked annoyed. I walked up to her as Seth greeted Stephanie.

"You see that Chinese place across from the arena?" I asked her. "Open twenty-four hours."

"Dean saw it. He wants to grab some food from there afterwards," she replied. We watched as Stephanie stopped Seth from hugging her and created a boundary between them. "I almost feel sorry for him."

"I don't," I said. "He was way too dependent on Stephanie and Hunter when we were in the Authority. This is a good thing." Stephanie offered Seth a handshake and then walked away, leaving Seth looking confused and a bit hurt. I sighed. "Ok… maybe I feel a little bad for him…"
Chris Jericho won his qualifying match against Apollo Crews. Big Cass, a new addition to Raw with his tag partner Enzo from NXT, won against Bubba Ray Dudley. That left Dean's match against Dolph Ziggler and AJ Styles's match against Kevin Owens.

Roman watched Dean's match in his locker room, but he was so focused on it, he didn't even notice when I left. Seth was watching in catering and greeted me with a huge smile as I sat next to him. "Think he'll win?" he asked.

"Of course. Dee is gonna win tonight, and go on to win the contract. And either you or Roman are going to have to watch your back."

"But I'll have you to watch my back, won't I?" He grinned at me.

"Yeah, I've got your back," I said softly. His grin grew wider and I blushed, realizing what I had said. A little louder, I went on to explain, "I'm the manager to the WWE Heavyweight Champion, they will always have my loyalty."

"Of course, babe."

**********

Dean won, as I knew he would. As for the last match, well, Kevin Owens won against AJ Styles. That left two matches left to determine the remaining entrants, but that would be for another day.

**********

"Baby girl…"

I looked over at Roman, who was driving. I had been nodding off a little, tired as I was from everything that had happened earlier. Dean was passed out in the backseat with Renee. "What's up?"

"I don't trust Seth."

"Oh… ok? I mean, it's been a while since you have…” I tilted my head a little. "I'm confused…”

Roman shook his head. "He's behaving differently towards you. I think he's trying to manipulate you, get you to side with him, help him take the championship from me. I don't trust him."

"He's right," Dean mumbled. I guess he wasn't as asleep as I had originally thought. "The traitor's acting weird towards you. You know he'll do just about anything to get his hands on the title."

"Ah… now I get it." I sighed. It honestly didn't seem all that different to me, but I could understand Roman's point of view. "Well, I already warned him that I wouldn't be doing that, but if you feel that I'm compromised in any way, please tell me. I may not like it, or agree, but I will listen to your concerns."

Roman reached out to grab my hand and gave it a little squeeze before returning it to the wheel.

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Smackdown - May 26, 2016

Michael Cole started off the show talking with Dean, but Kevin Owens came out to interrupt, who
was interrupted by Sami, who was interrupted by Alberto del Rio. Roman and I didn't need to be here tonight, but considering one of the matches was a qualifier for the MITB ladder match, Roman insisted on it. I didn't mind, since Seth was here as well.

"These guys never learn," Roman said. "Deano's gonna wipe the floor with all of them."

"Definitely. Alberto's not even officially in the ladder match yet. He has to beat…" I checked my tablet. "Zack Ryder. Honestly, I hope Zack wins. Alberto gets on my nerves."

Unfortunately, Alberto won the match.

**********

"Why does he always look so devastatingly handsome in all black," I murmured to myself, biting my lip. Seth was in the ring, talking to the crowd.

"Did you say something, baby girl?" He had pulled out his headphones and was looking at me curiously.

"No, just talking to myself. Don't worry about it, Ro."

He shrugged and put the headphones back in while I turned my attention back to Seth on the screen. He riled the crowd up, getting them to cheer for him, asking if they missed him… and then squashed their hopes by saying he didn't miss any of them. I had to laugh at that.

**********

It was announced backstage after Smackdown was done. The formal announcement to the public would be aired in the next few days, but for now, management wanted us all to know about it.

"Quiet down, everyone," Stephanie said, her voice a little more shrill than normal.

"Everyone, please," Shane said, holding his hands up. "We have something important to tell you."

Stephanie looked annoyed as the group listened to her brother instead of her. "Well, thank you, Shane. Now that we have your attention, there's going to be some big changes coming up. Well, one major change, and then a lot of fallout changes because of it."

"Settle down, settle down," Shane said. "It's nothing bad, and no one will be getting fired. Just listen to the entire announcement."

"Settle down, settle down," Shane said. "It's nothing bad, and no one will be getting fired. Just listen to the entire announcement."

I felt an arm slip over my shoulders. "Hey, babe," Seth whispered. I smiled at him but shushed him. I could feel Roman's eyes on me, but I would have to deal with him later.

"In July, Smackdown will be moved to Tuesday nights…" Shane said.

"And it will become Smackdown Live," Stephanie finished. The whole room erupted into questions and excitement, and it took Shane and Stephanie several minutes to calm everyone down. "That's not all. Our father has decided to bring back the brand split, so there will be rosters for Raw and Smackdown, and the two will not mingle except for the four major pay-per-views each year."

The room erupted again, this time with protests. Seth had gone still during this whole thing. "Hey, you ok?"

"What? Oh, yeah… I'm fine…" He didn't look fine. He looked worried. "It's nothing, babe. I'm
Sure this will all work out."

Chapter End Notes

So, in case you were wondering, the time off for Seth was heavily influenced by the storyline Boom Comics did about him. Also, that Wolverine comment in the text messages between Seth and the reader? I wrote that before he came out in the Wolverine inspired ring gear! That made me so happy to see!!! I honestly used that because I'm rather fond of Logan in general.
The traditional silence for the veterans and the fallen soldiers was just as heavy as it had been last year, but this year, Seth was standing beside me once again. He elbowed his way to me, taking the other side from Roman as the superstars gathered on the stage.

"Seth," Roman rumbled, glaring at him.

"Roman," Seth replied back, and hooked my arm around his. "I wanted to stand over here. You got a problem with that?"

"I definitely have a problem with you bothering my little sister," Roman growled, taking a step towards Seth. R-Truth was also next to Roman.

"Chill, dawg," he whispered, holding onto Roman's arm. "We're about to go live on tv."

Roman didn't get any closer, but he was still glaring at Seth. "Bring it, big dog," Seth taunted.

"Jeebus… if you're gonna be fighting like this, I'm going to go stand with Dee," I said, pushing them apart. Dean was on the other side of the stage, chatting quietly with Renee and Titus O'Neill. Roman and Seth quieted down as the stagehand walked by us, letting us know the cameras were about to go live.

**********

Shane and Stephanie went out to the ring to talk about the upcoming brand split, only to be interrupted by New Day, who demanded to know where they would be sent. It was then that Shane and Stephanie admitted that that was undecided. A few more questions from the New Day, and it became clear that very little had been decided about the brand split except for the fact that it would happen. It wasn't even decided which McMahon sibling would run which show. "This is a freakin' mess," I muttered.

New Day was trying to help Shane and Stephanie decide with a dance challenge, but they were interrupted by their opponents for the evening, the Vaudevillains, Simon Gotch and Aiden English, new additions to the main roster from NXT. I didn't watch the match, but I heard about what happened later on. Luke Gallows and Karl Anderson, buddies of AJ Styles who had helped him during his quest against Roman, caused a disqualification when they attacked New Day, and then the Vaudevillains helped Gallows and Anderson take down New Day. I had had a bad feeling about them when they first came to WWE, and seeing them again tonight did nothing to change that feeling.

**********

Roman and I walked out together to the ring. The crowd was more boos than cheers, which pissed me off, but Roman didn't seem to mind much. "Better that they're loud with boos than quiet," he had said.

I still didn't like it, but I kept my mouth shut while Roman paced around the ring, waiting for a good moment to start talking. That took a while. He talked about how Seth liked to run his mouth,
which he had been doing a lot, even when cameras weren't on him, but that it was funny to Roman that Seth liked to call himself "The Man" when all he ever did was run away from "The Guy."

"I really wish you wouldn't call yourself that," I said, shaking my head as Roman grinned. "It's so corny."

"My little sis," he said into the microphone, "she finds this corny, but it's the truth. I'm not a bad guy, I'm not a good guy… but as long as this is on my shoulder," he held up the title, "I'm just the Guy." He grinned at me and winked. I rolled my eyes. "Now, Seth, why don't you prove you're a man and come on out here?"

It took a moment or two, but Seth's music started up and soon he was walking down the ramp towards the ring. Then he paused. He started walking again, but paused a second time. He looked concerned. He seemed to decide and started towards the ring again, only to stop yet again.

"This is ridiculous," I muttered.

"Baby girl, get out of the ring, just in case he actually decides to do anything," Roman growled. "In fact, head to the back.

Spoiler alert, he did not. Well, he did decide to waste time, and fake out Roman. Several times. Honestly, it was more "annoying" than "playing mind games" as JBL said. Every time he walked forward, I would start walking to the back, but I only made it to the middle of the aisle before he finally headed to the back.

I stood there, my arms crossed over my chest, and looked back at Roman. He shrugged, and went to pick up his title from where he had set it down. Seth came barrelling down the ramp as Roman's back was turned, and it was only the screams from the crowd that alerted him. He turned just before Seth got to the ring, and it was like a game of Red Light, Green Light. Seth was frozen in place, just staring up at Roman. Then his shoulders relaxed and he began walking backwards, laughing.

"We go on my time, Roman. The ball is in my court, not yours!" He looked over at me, though if he wanted encouragement or approval, I had neither to give him.

I gave him a Look. "You're an idiot," I said and started walking back up the ramp, leaving Seth to Roman.

**********

"Babe, come on, look at me."

"No, I'm annoyed at you." I stared at the vending machine. Something I missed about Seth being champion was the premium snacks I had access to. Roman usually ate them before I even got there, which I couldn't get mad at, since they were his to begin with, but still!

"Come on, I was just trying to mess with Roman. I thought you…" He looked around and then dropped his voice to a whisper. "I thought you'd find it funny!"

I glanced at him. He was grinning so hard, I couldn't help but grin back. "Oh, I found it funny, but not because it was actually funny. It was because you're such an idiot for thinking that sort of thing would work, especially on Roman."

"Well, what do you suggest?"
An innocent question from a not so innocent man. "I am not answering that."

"It's just a question." He was grinning wider, if that was possible.

"No, it's asking me to betray the WWE Champion. Would you appreciate it if Roman had come to me during your title reign and asked for suggestions on how to mess with you?"

The smile finally fell from his face. "No…" He leaned over and inserted coins into the vending machine, then pushed a few of the buttons. A candy bar fell into the receptacle below. He reached in and then handed it to me. "Here."

"How'd you know I wanted this one?"

"It's like the ones you used to take from my gift bags," he said with a shrug. "Roman not sharing his? Can't say I'm surprised. Uce likes his food."

"I end up not having to workout as hard to burn off the calories, at least." Biting into the candy bar filled me with sugary happiness. "Thanks for this."

"Not a problem, babe. Anything for you."

**********

"Kiddo, did you know about Sami being Canadian?" I turned to see Dean looking concerned.

"Uh… yeah? Why?"

"I was surprised at first, but then a lot of things made sense. Chris Jericho, Kevin Owens. Both Canadians. Then that border patrolman, the one that took my nunchucks…"

I shook my head. "Dean, I've told you a dozen times, stop taking weapons through customs. And you do realize your girlfriend is Canadian, too, right?"

Dean got a look of confusion on his face, then said, "Ohhhhh… yeah, that explains it." I didn't want to ask.

**********

I heard my name called from across catering and turned to see Lana heading towards me. "Oh, hey, Lana. What's up?"

"I feel like I haven't spoken to you in a while."

I smiled. I had heard that Lana had been taking vocal lessons, in order to rid herself of her accent. Sometimes she said a word and her old accent could be heard, like just now when she meant to say "a while". "Well, to be fair, you've been busy with Rusev and his reclamation of the US title."

"My real American hero!" she exclaimed. "Perhaps we should arrange a champion verse champion match. My hero… against yours?" She grinned so charmingly, I couldn't help but return it.

"I'll talk to Roman, but considering how preoccupied he's been with Rollins, this probably won't happen anytime soon."

"And you? Hav you been preoccupied with Seth Rollins? I see the way you look at each other."

"We're just friends, Lana. Like you and me. We're friends."
Lana smirked. "He is *too* friendly with you to *just* be friends like you and me. I certainly don't keep my hands on you like he does."

"We… we're just very close," I said, though my voice sounded weak. "But I assure you, our relationship is purely platonic."

Lana didn't look like she believed me, but I was relieved when she changed the topic to the new diet and workout she was trying.

**********

"Baby girl, I think Seth is getting too close to you," Roman said. We were heading to the airport. "He's up to something, I just know it."

"What do you want me to do? I honestly don't see it, but I'll be the first to admit that Rollins is one of my best friends and I might be a little blind to his antics."

"You… you think of him as your best friend?"

I blushed hard, realizing I had admitted to something that might worry Roman and make him question my loyalty. "Yeah, but I promise to try hard to not let that cloud my judgement." I really did mean it. "I'll… I'll try to keep some distance from him."

"See that you do," Roman said, but he sounded sad. I had no idea why, and I wanted to ask, but I was scared to hear his answer.

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Smackdown - June 2, 2016

"Hey, babe. I brought those snacks you like, and some movies you've been wanting to see. Which we can watch after Smackdown, if you want." Seth held up a bag and three DVDs, a huge smile on his face. His suitcase was at his feet. I had the night off since Roman had requested it off for both of us. He was concerned about me being around Seth at work, though he probably hadn't expected Seth to show up at my home.

I held the door open, but blocked him from entering. "Roman wants me to stay away from you."

"I'd rather not talk about Roman right now. In fact, I'd like to talk about anything *but* Roman and the title. First off, what the hell are you wearing? And did you know there's some rando sitting in his car down the street? What's up with that?"

"You can clearly see that I'm wearing flannel pajama bottoms and an old Shield t-shirt," I said, annoyed. "I'm at home and I like to be comfortable, thank you very much. And I have no idea who you're talking about, but if they're down the street, then who cares." I stepped aside to let him in. "Smackdown first, Dee has a match. Then we can watch the movies. Oh, and you're buying dinner." What Roman didn't know, didn't hurt him, and if Seth did anything to try and get info on Roman, then he was in for a painful surprise.
"Man, that was such a good break, wasn't it?" Seth was smiling way too much for my comfort.

"Shut up, Rollins. I'm supposed to be keeping my distance from you, remember?"

He was following me into the arena. "I remember. No one said I have to keep my distance from you though." I was annoyed and happy at the same time that he was right. "I'll follow you anywhere, babe."

My face heated up at his words, but I was facing away from him, so he didn't see it. "You're going to follow me right into Roman's fist to your face if you're not careful."

He laughed, and possibly said, "Worth it," but I wasn't completely certain about that.

The show opened with the MITB participants in a ladder summit. It was exactly what it sounds like. Each of the six men were either sitting or standing at the top of a ladder, just talking at each other. Until Jericho set everyone off with his idiocy and Dean attacked him. It didn't last long, because Teddy Long came out and turned the chaos into a chance to be general manager again. Stephanie came out to rain on his parade and send him on his way. She then declared that all of the MITB participants would be in singles matches. Sami would take on Alberto del Rio, Dean would take on Kevin Owens, and that left Cesaro with Chris Jericho, with their match being first.

"Hey… you gonna be ok for these video packages to promote the title match? They mention… well, mine, at least, mentions the stuff with the Shield. And… I'm not gonna apologize. I did what I felt I had to do." Seth looked so concerned, that I had to smile even though sadness was creeping in from remembering the bad parts.

"I appreciate the heads up. I'll probably skip it."

"Or… and I'm just throwing this out there, we could talk about what happened?"

Considering I had talked about it with him already, I didn't want to go through it again, but he didn't remember because of the anesthesia he had been under the influence of. If I was going to talk about it again, I wanted to have everyone on relatively good terms again, which was not going to happen while two of the three men involved were vying for the same title. "I'd rather not. Not right now, anyway."

"Babe…"

Roman was heading towards us. "I told you, not now."

"He bothering you, baby girl?"

To tell the truth or to cover it up? I was fed up with both of them at the moment, Seth with his strange doggedness on the past and Roman with his fixation on Seth's attachment to me. "Yes. He keeps asking me to talk about what happened the night after Payback 2014. Which, I believe, is
also something you bug me about, though not quite as much as Rollins. Maybe you two can hash it out, and then get back to me on your progress." Both Seth and Roman's eyes went a little wide at that. "No? Then stop asking me if you aren't willing to talk to each other." I walked away, still annoyed but feeling satisfied with shutting both of them up for a while. It wouldn't last, of course, but nothing ever lasts, does it?

**********

Despite saying I'd skip the video, I watched it from one of the more isolated monitors. It was not as bad as I expected. The part about the Shield was less than thirty seconds, and the rest of it focused more on the more recent events since Seth's return.

Roman's side of the story was shown later in the evening. That one was harder to watch. There was more of the Shield's past in it. I was glad to be alone in watching it. My tears flowed freely, from the betrayal, from the anger at Seth taking Roman's moment at Wrestlemania 31, to knowing what we had had before would never come back. My brothers, my best friend… we would never be a family again, and I still didn't know how to deal with that. At least the crying made me feel better now, instead of sending me to a darker place.

Dean's match against Kevin was fun to watch, especially when Dean won with a surprise reversal of Kevin's Pop Up Powerbomb into a Dirty Deeds.

**********

After the show ended, I walked to the car with Dean. We noticed at the same time and it was pretty funny to see both Roman and Seth heading towards us, spotting each other, and then speeding up but trying to not seem like they were hurrying to beat each other.

"Should we stop and let them run to us?" Dean asked.

"I think we should stop, turn around, and run in the other direction."

Dean giggled over that as we slowed down. "Oh, well, I guess I could go grab some leftovers from catering. Wanna come with?"

"I could totally help you carry stuff," I offered, turning around so that Seth and Roman were now behind us. Dean grinned as he turned as well, and we began walking quickly back down the hallway. I heard both Roman and Seth call out to us, but we just picked up the pace, and then hid behind some equipment boxes after we turned a corner. I had to cover my mouth to keep in the laughter as we watched them run past us, shoving each other slightly as they tried to out pace the other.

"We should totally just run to the car, and then just, like, wait for them and act like nothing happened," Dean suggested.

Seth's theme song played from my phone, indicating that he was calling me. "We should hurry. They'll figure it out soon enough."

I silenced my phone as we ran back to the car. We were huffing and puffing, but by the time Roman and Seth found us, we had mostly calmed down. My pulse was still racing a bit as I rolled down the window and smiled at Seth. "Sup?"

"That's all you got?" Seth asked, very annoyed. "'Sup?! I was looking all over for you!"

"No, I was looking for her," Roman said, climbing into the driver's seat. "You were stalking all
over for her. Now, if you don't mind, we have to get to the airport. So, shoo."

Seth suddenly got a very smug look on his face. "Oh, sure. Don't let me keep you." He leaned into the open window and kissed my forehead. "Have a safe flight, babe," he stage whispered, making sure it was loud enough for Roman to hear him. I knew it was because Roman started growling. I shoved Seth away, gave him a stern look and rolled up the window.

**********

"Did you get me an extra pillow?"

I looked up at my seatmate for the flight. Seth grinned down at me as he leaned on the back of the seat in front of me. I sighed and held up the extra pillow.

"Excellent. You're too good to me."

"Yeah, yeah. You owe me your bag of peanuts, Rollins."

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"You're not even an inch away from me," Seth pointed out.

"I'm supposed to stay far away from you as Roman's manager," I clarified. "But as your bestest friend in the whole entire world, I have a duty to watch movies for the bajillionth time with you, get coffee with you, and maybe braid your hair."

"Only if I get to braid yours."

"Deal."
Chapter Notes

Sorry for the lack of posting, things have been weird lately.

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**Raw - June 13, 2016**

We all stood on the stage, Shane, Stephanie, every superstar and their managers. Lillian announced our reason. A moment of silence for those whose lives were taken in the horrific shooting of the Pulse nightclub the day before. It was already being called the worst terrorist attack since 9/11, and also the deadliest mass shooting by a single shooter in the history of the United States. Roman had mentioned that Naomi was taking it harder than everyone else, since she had been a regular at the club in the past. And something about a beloved family member? I made a mental note to give her a hug later.

**********

It was announced that Dean would be hosting a special segment called The Ambrose Asylum, and his guests would be none other than Seth and Roman. A Shield reunion, of sorts. I was not looking forward to it. All of us in the ring at the same time? I could only hope Dean didn't stir the pot too much, and that I was able to make sure they all kept their cool.

A hand dropped on my shoulder. "It's been a while, hasn't it?"

I turned to see Kane. "Oh my gosh, Kane!" I jumped to hug him. "What are you doing here?" I hadn't seen him since he had been eliminated by Baron Corbin in the Andre the Giant battle royal match at Wrestlemania.

"Oh, I heard the McMahons are looking for people to help with the new management setup, so I thought I'd come in and submit my resume. I did such a good job as Director of Operations, that I'm a shoo-in for a general manager position!"

I snorted. "Kane, you went mad with revenge and power, culminating in your termination from said director's position."

Kane considered that, then said cheerfully, "I'm sure they won't hold that against me!"

"Good luck making your case, then," I said with a laugh.

**********

"Gah! Where is it where is it where is it??" I dumped the contents of the bag onto the table. I was in the hallway of the arena, messily going through the contents of the bag.

"Babe! What are you-- Wait… Is that my bag?!" Seth asked.

"Where is it…" I mumbled, ignoring him. "Wallet, wrist wraps, notebook, con--" I stared at the little foil packets in my hand, then tossed those aside, my cheeks feeling warm all of a sudden. "Condoms? Seriously?"
"Hey, I mean, you never know when you're gonna need them, right?" He sounded embarrassed as he picked them up and stuffed them in his pocket. "Ms. Right could be right around the corner."

"Uh huh," I said, still rooting through his stuff. More like Ms. Right Now, I thought, a little morosely, but I shoved that thought away. It's not my business who he takes to his hotel room. I tried to focus on my self-given task. "I know you have some…"

"What the hell are you looking for??"

"Here!" I held up the package of cinnamon gum in triumph. Quickly, I took a piece and shoved it in my mouth, chewing gratefully as the slight spicy flavor enveloped my taste buds. "Oh, thank goodness…"

"Uh…"

I turned to Seth. "Sorry, I'll clean this all up. Ate a bad sandwich. It was so gross…"

"What kind was it?" he asked with a frown.

"Turkey and ham with cheese. I bought it at the gas station earlier, ate it just a little while ago. Two bites in and it went in the trash."

He snorted. "Why the hell would you buy a sandwich from a gas station?"

"Hey, in my defense, some gas stations have really good fresh food. This one just… wasn't." I shrugged and started putting his stuff back in his bag. "Had to get the taste out of my mouth and I remembered that you always carry gum or mints. There, all back inside. No worse for wear."

"You could have just asked me, you know."

"I know. But I was in a bit of panic and I also knew you wouldn't mind terribly if I just looked for it myself." I handed it back to him with my most apologetic smile. "Forgive me? And why do you always carry cinnamon stuff on you anyway?"

He shrugged. "Nothing to forgive. My stuff is pretty much your stuff at this point. And the reason i carry it is because it's nice to smell nice. Plus, cinnamon seems to be a good scent, as well as flavor. Since not everyone uses it, it kind of stands out. You like it, right?" I nodded. "Perfect example. There's a pretty girl, she wants an autograph or a photo, I slide up to her, give her my best smile…" He literally slid up to my side with a dazzling smile and put his arm around me, his phone already in his hand, ready to take a selfie. "You smell nice." He nuzzled my cheek and my mind went a little fuzzy. I vaguely recalled hearing the phone take a picture of us. "See? I leave them dazed and feeling good."

I shook my head, trying to clear it. "Yeah, well," I started to say, but then had no idea where I was going with it. I saw Roman waving me over. "Um… I gotta go… Duty calls."

**********

As the host of the Ambrose Asylum talk show, Dean went out to the ring first. I still couldn't believe he got this approved again. After a few minutes of monologue, Dean introduced his first guest, "scum of the earth, Seth Rollins". He said it so cheerfully, I had to laugh. Dean's introduction for Roman and I was much better. "The World Heavyweight Champion and the cutest manager on planet Earth, come on doowwwwng!"

I was disappointed in the boos we received, but Roman was just drinking it up. Once we got into
the ring, I stood with Dean, so that Roman and Seth could have a little staredown. A "Hounds of Justice" chant started, which pissed Seth off.

"Alright, let's get this started," Dean said. "It's a talk show, I have a talk show! So let's talk." He turned to Seth. "Seth! You suffered a terrible injury and the world wants to know… how's the knee?"

Seth glared at Dean. "Have you not watched the special about me on the Network??" Dean gave him a faux sheepish look. "I'll take that as a no. Suffice it to say, my knee is one-hundred percent ready to go."

"Oh, good, good… that's really good. What about your face? Does your face hurt?" I looked at Dean in amusement.

Seth just looked adorably confused. "What? What are you talking about? My face is fine."

"Really? You sure your face is fine? Because it's killin' me!" Seth groaned while the rest of us laughed.

"Good one, uce," Roman said, smiling.

"He always walks right into that one, doesn't he?" Dean asked.

I nodded. "Every single freakin' time."

"So, Roman, my brother. How's the Big Easy treating you?"

Roman grinned. "Not bad, not bad. Pretty good, actually." The crowd booed loudly at that. Wow, so you want to be known as a bad place to visit, is that it? I rolled my eyes. "Guess it's a bit of mix here," he said cheekily.

"Kiddo?"

I shrugged. "Can't complain. Finally got to try some beignets this time." The crowd cheered for that.

"And you, Seth? You having fun? You try any of those ninety-nine cent margaritas? They give you a headache, but they're so good." Dean grinned at Seth's annoyance of the reminder. Seth wasn't that much of a drinker to begin with, and when he did, it generally wasn't mixed drinks. There had been one celebration, back in the Shield days, where he drank margaritas and then started complaining about a headache. It had been bad enough that he had had to lie down on some chairs, using my lap as a pillow, until the headache went away, which was most of the time we spent in the restaurant. Roman and Dean had teased him about it ever since. "C'mon, man! Don't be such a sourpuss! You're bringing the vibe down in here. This is a talk show, my talk show. We're supposed to be having fun here. And, I mean, come on, when was the last time we were all in the ring together?"

Dean put his arm over my shoulders and pulled me in, putting the microphone right in my face. "Uh… you mean, just the four of us? Because it's been a very long while. But if you mean us plus other people… um, then probably that match of you three against the Wyatt family last year… though that didn't exactly end very well."

"Now who's being a sourpuss. You've been hanging out with Sethie boy too much. Relax, chill out, have some fun. Don't be such a party pooper like this dude." He pointed at Seth. Seth glared, and the crowd started chanting Party Pooper!
"Hey, I am *not* a party pooper!" he shouted at them. Dean sniggered while Roman and I tried to keep a straight face and failed. "Ok, fine, we've had some good times together. I mean, here, in this city, just across the street in the Superdome, at Wrestlemania a couple years ago… that was a pretty good time, taking out the old fogies, the New Age Outlaws and Kane…" The crowd cheered for that.

"Oh, don't forget about London," I said.

Seth smiled big at that. "Yes! London! When we flew in on a helicopter and took on Team Hell No and the Undertaker? Oh! Roman, uce, I know you remember this one. That sushi train, in Japan, the one with the conveyor belt? That was a good time." I laughed. That had been my favorite memory from the tours in Japan. "And what about that time we found Ambrose unconscious next to that dumpster? What town was that in? Salt Lake?"

"No, wasn't it in Denver?" I asked. Dean looked confused. "No surprise, you don't remember that."

"To be fair, it's happened a lot," he quipped. "I usually didn't have anyone to find me until the Shield came along."

"You're probably thinking about Albuquerque," Roman said quietly. "Deano went to the back to defend someone's honor, didn't tell us, and got ambushed."

"Not one of my better moments, but still fun," Dean said.

Seth threw his hands up into the air. "Ok, fine! I admitted it. We had good times. In fact… I think the best times I ever had in this ring, was with you three."

I grinned and put my hand over my heart, half to mock him, and half because I really was touched by his words. "You big softie."

"Yeah, yeah, can you blame me? We won titles together, we travelled the world together… I mean, our six man tag matches, with our little analyst/cheerleader in our corner are legendary. What about that time, Elimination Chamber 2014, when we took on the Wyatt family?"

I made a face. "We lost that match, but oh, what a match…" Dean and Roman nodded in agreement.

"Or the two we had against Evolution? We sent Batista packing." Seth was walking onto thin ice and I'm not sure he knew it. I gestured at him to stop. He took the hint, more or less. "Honestly, he owes us one, since he went on to become a big movie star."

"That's what I've been saying!" Dean exclaimed. The crowd was beginning to chant *Boo-tista! Boo-tista! Boo-tista!*

Roman laughed. "He has been saying that, actually."

"But for real… the best time I ever had with you two," Seth said, his tone becoming more sober. He glanced at me, and I thought I saw a hint of sorrow. He turned back to Roman, looked him dead in the eye and said, "Was when I took a chair and *put it in your back!*"

Dean's hold on my shoulder tightened a little. "You ok, kiddo?" he whispered as Roman's energy shifted and he went into serious mode, glaring at Seth.

"I'm ok," I told him, and truthfully, I was. The conversation I had had with Seth in his hospital room had helped me more than I had realized at the time, even if he didn't remember it. It still hurt
to think about that moment, but I didn't have flashbacks anymore, I didn't lose myself. I could glare at Seth and feel simply annoyance, instead of hopelessness. "You're being a dick."

"Sorry, but you know why I can't hold back right now." That part, at least, I understood. The important part of the road to the big matches was in taking down your opponent mentally, if not physically. "Oh, and you two weren't present for this next moment," Seth said to Dean and me, "but this was a big Shield moment, too, when at Wrestlemania, I took Roman's moment and claimed it for my own, by taking the WWE Heavyweight title for myself!" he shouted at Roman. His snarl turned into a cocky grin. "Those were some good moments, right?" Roman looked ready to kill Seth.

"Damn it, Rollins," I said, sighing and shaking my head at him. "I was actually having fun reminiscing."

"Yeah, calm down, guy," Dean said, stepping in between Roman and Seth. "Let's not turn it into one of those kinds of talk shows. Let's get back on track. I've got business here. Kiddo, stand in between them, be a buffer. They won't fight with you right there."

I stepped forward as Dean stepped back and placed my left hand on Roman's chest, my right on Seth's. If they went at each other, I'd be able to push them apart almost immediately. Unless they completely lost it on each other. Dean was now behind me, so I couldn't see what he was doing. I'd have to turn my head to see either Seth or Roman. "I'll do my best, but you know this is not a one hundred percent guarantee, right?" I asked him.

"I know, I know. More like eighty percent, but still better than nothing," Dean said. "Ok, let's talk about Money In the Bank. It's coming up this next Sunday, after all. Roman, the champ! You're defending the title in a big match, what can we expect?"

Looking straight at Seth, Roman said, "Big Dog walks in as champ. And Big Dog walks out as champ."

Seth made a face, half a laugh and half a grimace. Dean went on to say, "Now that's interesting, because Sethie boy over here, he believes you're not the rightful champion. That he never lost that title. Isn't that right, Seth, isn't that how you feel?"

The vein in Seth's head was pulsating as he answered, "Did he ever beat me for that championship? No. He. Did. Not."

"Ok, I know I didn't really explain the rules, but this is my talk show so I ask the questions around here," Dean said. "I'll let it slide since you answered it yourself though. Roman, how do you feel about that?"

"If you're the rightful champ," Roman said, and looked down at his title, "Then why do I have this?" He stepped forward, and I had to put my hand to his chest to remind him I wasn't going to let him start a fight.

Dean, now sounding annoyed, said, "Ok, I know we're brothers and friends, but I just explained it to the party pooper, I ask the questions around here, it's kinda my thing. So, Seth... why does he have this?" I heard Dean on my right, but I could just barely see his finger touching the title on Roman's shoulder if I turned to Roman.

_He must be right in Seth's face right now, or at least close enough to be annoying._

Seth rolled his eyes hard. He had clearly had it with this segment. "He has that because my knee
caved from carrying this company on my back for the better part of last year!!" he snarled. "And you know what, while I was gone, Roman earned it. I'll give him that. Because, and correct me if I'm wrong, at Survivor Series, he beat you, Dean."

The crowd went Ohhhhhh! and I heard one kid yell out, "BURN!"

"Couple months later, he took care of Sheamus, and then at Wrestlemania…" Seth paused. I looked at him, hoping he could see that I was supporting him still. He gave me a quick smile before returning his attention to Roman. "At Wrestlemania, you beat the Game, Triple H. So yeah, you've earned that title… there's only one thing left to do for it to be completely and utterly yours."

"And what's that?" Roman sneered.

"You need to beat me for it. Which… you can't!" Seth yelled, a bit too gleefully.

Dean tapped my shoulder. "Things are getting to the boiling point," he said. "Not even you can stop them."

Now I was getting annoyed. "Just watch me."

Dean smirked. "Have it your way then."

"You can't beat me, Roman. Because, let's just face the facts, I. Am. Better. Than. You!" Roman's jaw was clenched tight. "No matter what you do, how you train, I will always be two steps ahead of you."

Roman glanced at me, suspicion in his eyes. "Hey!" I said. Like I would betray him like that!

Seth cackled. "You can't be serious. You actually think she'd give me even a hint about you? Her lips are locked up tighter than Fort Knox, though I'm sure I could sweet talk my way in if I really put my mind to it."

Dean's eyes went wide. "Uh… do I need to get my baby sister a chastity belt to protect her from the big bad wolf?"

Seth reddened as I wanted the floor to open up and swallow me whole. "Oh my god, Dee… that is not what he meant and you know it!" I hissed. Luckily, he hadn't been holding the microphone up at the moment, so the crowd had no idea what he had said, but they had certainly heard Seth's words.

A small section, mostly men, started to chant Sweet talk Fort Knox! Sweet talk Fort Knox! I glared at them, and they settled down, for the most part.

"Idiots…" I muttered.

"Suffice it to say!" Seth continued, "There is nothing that you can do that I can't do better. And I will admit, we are a lot alike, but there is one big difference. You couldn't get that title without me."

"Wait, what?" I asked.

"I think he's hit his head a few too many times," Dean said.

"Without me there to hold your hand, guide you, lead you to victory time and time again, you wouldn't be where you are now. If I hadn't hurt my knee, you would have fallen at Survivor Series
last year, and I… I would still be the champion.”

I had to admit… he might be right about that. Not that I would say it out loud, of course.

"And everything I did, all my accomplishments, I did them all on my own.”

My head snapped up at that. "Excuse me? Did I just hear you right?"

"Uh… I mean…”

I stepped away from where I stood and squared up in front of Seth and jabbed a finger into his chest. "Because as I recall, you won the Money In The Bank contract with help from the Authority, specifically from Kane. You won the title with the unwitting help of Roman since triple threat rules were in play. You retained the title on multiple occasions thanks to J & J Security, thanks to…” I had been about to say tricking the Undertaker, but I didn't want to bring up that little ruse. "Thanks to other people's vendettas against your opponents, and because I was there to watch your back. At the end, you were not as dependent on the Authority, but you were not alone, Seth. So don't even think of saying you were!” I could feel my lower lip quivering, just a little, but I kept myself together. It just hurt so much to be ignored like that, especially by him.

"I did a lot," he said quietly, taking my hand so I wasn't jabbing him anymore. His expression was tender as he looked at me, "Because I had you at my side. Because I had your support. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to… I did a lot because of you." He reached for my face, but Dean pulled me back, positioning himself between Seth and me. I had to let go of Seth or risk getting my arm tugged off. The tender look on Seth's face vanished as he glared at Dean. "But you're not by my side right now. Not yet. And at this time, I vow that I will take back that title on my own.”

The crowd cheered, though if it was because they truly backed Seth, or if it was because they just didn't want to see Roman as champion anymore, I couldn't tell.

"Took the words right out of my mouth, kiddo," Dean said. "All on his own… damn. Crop of lies there…”

"No," Roman said, "He's right.”

"Sorry, what?" Dean and I said at the same time.

"All on his own, he screwed me at Wrestlemania. All on his own, he broke up the Shield, our group." Roman turned to Seth. "You didn't just break up a group, you broke up our family. Dean and I weren't just your friends, we were your brothers! And she…” Roman gestured to me, "You may not have considered her your sister, but you two were thick as thieves. Best friends. When we came here, we all had your back, we were the only ones to have your back!”

I felt ill from all this talk about the past, but it still wasn't as bad as it once been. Dean's arm around my shoulders helped keep me steady. "I got you, kiddo," he whispered.

"Thanks, Dee.”

Roman wasn't done yet. "And for what? Greed? Limelight? To be famous? Is that what you want? You want to run around here and call yourself the Man, just to be in the spotlight? Well, guess what? This Sunday, you're going to have that spotlight right on you, and you're going to be alllllllllll on your own in that ring… with me.”

Chills ran down my spine. Did Seth realize the fire he had ignited in Roman?
"And after Sunday, they're not going to call me The Guy because I have this." He held up the title for a moment. "They're going to call me The Guy because I beat you."

They stared and sneered at each other, even as Dean spoke up. "Well, there you have it, folks! This Sunday, will it be the contender, the man who never lost his title, Seth Rollins? Or will it be the Big Dog, The Guy, the champion, Roman Reigns?"

There was a clear bias on Dean's part for Roman, though the crowd gave more cheers for Seth. Roman's response was half cheers, half boos, yet much louder overall.

"Or..." Dean was apparently not done. "Or will it be a third? What if I win the contract this Sunday... and whether it's you," he snarled to Seth. "Or you," he said to Roman, "I will cash in that night to become the new WWE Champion!" The crowd really lost their minds at that.

Seth just looked annoyed and turned to walk away.

"Was it something I said?" Dean asked, turning to Roman and me, just as Seth turned and attacked him from behind, sending him into Roman. I was safe, for the moment, though Roman got knocked out of the ring completely. Dean and Seth were rolling around the ring, throwing punches at each other.

"Will you please behave?" I asked in vain.

Roman came roaring back into the ring to separate them, but nearly got Pedigreed for his efforts. Dean rescued him, but it was Roman who sent Seth to the ground with a Superman Punch. Mistakenly, I thought it was over, and went to check on Seth. He was dazed, but coming around. I looked up just in time to see Dean kick Roman in the stomach and apply Dirty Deeds to him. Roman rolled to the side of the ring. He had been surprised, but I could see him looking up at Dean, his eyes clear. He would be fine.

Seth got to his feet. "You bastard!" He charged at Dean, but Dean ducked underneath Seth's attack. Seth bounced off the ropes, and ran right into my Superkick. Roman had gotten to his feet as well, spitting mad, but he didn't stay up for long, since I Superkicked him as well.

Dean, on the other hand... he had picked up the title and was holding it up to the delight of the crowd.

I walked over to Dean, holding my hand out for him to give me back the title. "That's not yours."

"Not yet," he said with a grin. "But this Sunda--" He didn't get to finish. I kicked him as he had kicked Roman, right in the stomach, causing him to double over. Then, I grabbed his arm and spun around him, jumping high so I was on his back and could capture his other arm with my legs. I called it the Infinity Lock, since it was kind of like the infinity symbol, plus, I could hold it for what felt like an eternity to the person in the lock. He yelled for me to let go, but I held on until I felt him tap on my forearm. He dropped to his knees as I gracefully rolled off his back and landed on my feet.

Picking up the microphone, I spoke clearly so everyone could hear me. "I look forward to Sunday and to seeing who walks out as champion... but if any of you step out of line like that again, you will answer to me. You got that?"

I heard very weak agreements from all three of them. Dean gave me a thumbs up as well.

"Good. When you get backstage, I'll have ice packs waiting for all of you."
"What the hell was that…" Roman asked. He was looking better than he had when he stumbled into the trainers' room. "That kick?"

Grinning, I said, "It's called a Superkick. Rollins taught me."

Roman was not amused. Mostly. I saw a muscle tick at the corner of his mouth. "I know what the move is called, baby girl. I meant, why did you do that to me?"

"Oh, that. If I hadn't, you three would have torn each other apart. All I did was nip that in the bud. Better a quick kick from me than a beating from Dean and Seth."

"I would not have--"

"Bullshit!" I said with a laugh. "You three would have kept going until each of you couldn't stand on your own two feet! It's not hard to predict that sort of thing." Roman grunted, but he seemed to agree.

"Still… that was a really good kick," he said, rubbing his jaw. "Seth created a monster when he agreed to train you. And what was that submission move? That wasn't an octopus hold."

"No… it was a mix of the crucifix hold with two arm bars that stretches the chest as the arms are pulled back."

"Seth teach you that, too?"

"Dean did, actually. Well, he helped me develop it. We're still working on it." I sat down next to Roman. "It's called the Infinity Lock. You would know this if you came to work out with us once in a while."

"Sorry." He did seem to genuinely regret it. "Schedule is crazy, you know."

"I know. I can fix it, if you'd let me. I feel like you're not utilizing me as much as your manager as you should be."

"I'm good. I--"

"Roman…" I brushed his hair back. "Rollins said the same thing to me, and look what ended up happening to him. I don't want you to push yourself like he did. I can do so much more than you have let me do so far. I mean… when I took off to help Rollins after Wrestlemania? You weren't inconvenienced very much, were you?" He shook his head. "If it had been the reverse, let me tell you, Rollins would have been up shit creek without a paddle!"

Roman laughed at that.

"Let me help you, Ro… I can do so much more than what you're letting me do."

"Fine. Help me like you helped Seth and then some. Last thing I want to do is be like him."

The main event of the night was complete and utter chaos. Stephanie threw Dean into a match against Chris Jericho, just because she didn't like that Shane brought back the Ambrose Asylum, and then Shane put Sami on commentary for the match. Kevin wasn't happy about that and demanded to be put on commentary as well. Alberto Del Rio accused Kevin of sucking up to
Stephanie, and demanded to be on commentary, but since there was now five people on commentary, he was placed ringside as a special guest timekeeper. Shane, not one to be out done, added Cesaro as a special guest ring announcer.

Dean won the match, but afterwards was attacked by Kevin. Sami, Alberto, Cesaro and Chris joined in, turning the entire thing into an outright brawl of all the MITB match participants.

"And this just solidifies my reasoning for Superkicking you and Seth, and putting Dee into the Infinity." I said, watching them on the monitor. Roman gave me a questioning look. "If I hadn't, he would be a lot more beat up, and wouldn't have been able to win that match against Chris or hold his own in this brawl." Dean was the last one standing in the ring, the crowd chanting for him.

"You may have had a point…"

\[^v^v^v^v^v\]

Smackdown - June 16, 2016

The crowd was wild, screaming for each kick out, their emotions going up and down like a vomit inducing roller coaster. We were ready, waiting in the wings, searching for the signal. I caught the hand gesture, small though it was. "Now!" I hissed.

The three men charged out, a pack of hungry dogs, swarming the ring, attacking first Ryback, and then John Cena. Triple threat match rules meant their interference wasn't illegal. I stayed on the sidelines, listening as the announcers went nuts, wondering what was going on as the three men returned to beating up Ryback. They tossed him out of the ring, but followed him, clearing a space from the busted announcer's table that someone had been put through earlier in the match.

"Who the hell are these guys?!!" JBL demanded.

I grabbed a spare headset. "We are the Shield, gentlemen," I said. "Roman Reigns, Dean Ambrose, and the current NXT Champion, Seth Rollins. Learn those names, because they're going to go down in history."

"But… but what are they doing out here??" Michael Cole asked. The guys had finished clearing out the area, and were ready to make their final statement of the night. While we hadn't decided on a name for it, the move was perfection itself. It showed their strength, but more importantly, it showed their unity. They easily lifted Ryback up and powerbombed him through the Spanish announce table.

"Isn't it obvious?" I asked, giving Michael a slow, cruel smile. "They're taking what's theirs."

Roman turned to me, that turtleneck sweater nearly busting at the seams trying to hold on to his muscular frame. "Baby girl, you awake?"

I looked at him in confusion, then down at Ryback on the floor. Seth and Dean were drawing a mustache on him. "Wait… that's not… what?"

I jolted awake as Roman shook me gently. "Whoa… calm down. Sorry, wasn't sure if you were really asleep or not. Didn't you want to watch Smackdown?"

I wiped my face with my hand, still groggy. "Yeah, I did. Didn't mean to fall asleep." That hadn't been what happened that night… well, most of it was accurate. I certainly hadn't been as forceful when talking to the announcers. What was that dream about, I wondered, stifling a yawn.
"No worries. You were only out for a few minutes," Roman said, handing me a beer. "Happy I got us the night off?"

I smiled at Roman. "I really did want to be there for Dean, but yeah… I needed it." There was a knock at the door, earlier than I expected. Before sitting down, and apparently falling asleep, I had ordered some delivery Chinese food. "That new place is quick. I was going to make a snack run before they got here."

"I'll get it." Roman got up and headed to the door.

"Oh! I have a coupon," I said, getting up and running after him. I had left it on the entranceway table in the hall. "One of those introductory deals. Here it is--"

"What the fuck are you doing here?!" Roman roared.

I rushed over to the door, only to see a very startled looking Seth standing in the doorway. "I… uh…" Roman was practically growling at him like his moniker. "Didn't expect to see you here, Roman."

"Answer the question before I snap you in two!"

"I…that is to say…"

I sighed. "Come on in, Rollins. Roman, back the fuck off. I can explain." Roman stood his ground for a second, then moved reluctantly out of the way to let Seth in. "Rollins sometimes comes to hang out here. But I swear to you, we don't talk about work."

Roman frowned. "Is this why you got the new gaming consoles?"

I grimaced. "Yeah… we end up playing a lot of video games and watching a lot of movies. Sometimes we go to concerts."

Seth was remaining meek and quiet, very unlike his usual self.

"And that's… it?" Roman asked, looking confused.

"Well… yeah. We just hang out," I said. "The one rule I have is 'no work talk'. What were you expecting?"

"Not that. Well, the rule is totally you, but the rest of it… Fine, whatever. Looks like it's the three of us hanging out tonight." Roman glared at Seth, who looked like the boyfriend caught by the dad sneaking into his girlfriend's room.

_Oh, joy,_ I thought, just as the real delivery man showed up. _This should be… interesting._

I'm happy to say, no one killed anyone else that weekend.

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