

Women's Wrestling League

“And another clothesline from Viper! Is The Duchess down for the count?”

The referee rushed to the action and knelt over, slamming her hand against the ring as she counted off the seconds. The Women's Wrestling League would see its first new champion in years as The Duchess' undefeated reign would come to an end. The crowd of crazed female fans jostled each other playfully in their seats in excitement. Even their boyfriends, who were all skeptical about being dragged to “*women's wrestling*” were now screaming at the top of their lungs to crush The Duchess' crown.

Viper, who was squirming on her stomach—her signature taunt as she “watched the life drain from the eyes of her prey”—extended an oily arm out to the crown glued tightly to The Duchess' wig, shattering it with her fist before rising to her feet. Her scaly green leotard reflected the spotlight like a disco ball as she raised her fist, now stained red with the slick blood that came from meshing glass with flesh. As the audience bellowed and whistled, she lowered her fist and began munching on the bits of glass still resting atop her knuckles. The beauty of Women's Wrestling was that it was impossible to tell what's fake.

The Duchess didn't lift her face. Her arms showed no sign that she wanted to lift herself off the floor. Instead, she weakly reached into her ornate dress and raised a white cloth before emphatically lifting it in the air. The girls cried out in joy and some of them yelled into their boyfriends' ears to explain that waving a white flag meant surrendering.

The referee announced Viper as the winner and raised her arm again. But surely enough, Viper was back on her stomach and twitching her body as she eyed her opponent, who just now began rising to her feet. The fans quickly silenced. The former champion, even in defeat, carried

the same cold glare that froze her foes and fans alike in terror. The only thing that moved in the stadium was Viper's undulating body as her stomach rode the floor.

But even she stopped when they heard the scream. The sound of footsteps jostled this climatic scene as a large brute in a butler's uniform carried out a woman bleeding from the nose. The referee pressed a mic to her lips and gasped audibly. "What happened?" she cried out to him.

The butler rested the woman gently on the bleachers, where paramedics were stationed in case of emergency. He effortlessly hopped through the ropes and took the mic. "I just found her in the hallway passed out. Someone must have done this to her." His voice was gruff and monotone, as he looked around the room to convey the air of mystery which quickly overtook the room.

"Does anyone know who she is?" the referee replied, apparently dumbstruck.

At once, both The Duchess and Viper yelled "Isabelle!" in a panic and glared at each other like owls.

"And how do you know Isabelle?" Viper laughed. She kept smiling; since she was still on-stage, she needed to remain in-character, even if she was beyond pissed. "I'll have you know she was visiting me, her *girlfriend*!"

"And just how long have you been dating?" The Duchess responded. She shut her eyes tightly, breaking her soulless gaze. "Because *we* 've been going out for several years."

“Fine, maybe we haven’t lasted that long! But it’s clear she needs something you can’t provide!” She licked her lips, and the men—who were now rolling their eyes and making jokes about “soap operas”—were cheering for her once again.

Viper stepped towards The Duchess and put her hands around her neck. “Don’t fuck with me, you got your *butler* to rough her up, didn’t you?” She eyed the man with the microphone.

“Don’t threaten Klaus!” The Duchess replied, remembering to use his stage name is a moment of brilliance. She made an audible grunt as she leaned in closer towards Viper and breathily whispered, “I should kill you.”

The referee left the mic in Klaus’ hand and dashed towards the fighters. “Hey guys,” she said, “we really can’t break character right now. *Everyone’s* watching.”

“That’s a problem,” The Duchess said, slapping Viper with one of her flowered gloves. “I really want to fight.”

“Not a problem,” Viper replied, her smile plastering her face the longer she wore it. “How about a grudge match?”

“I see,” The Duchess replied, momentarily regaining her composure. “We get our anger out by hitting each other, the crowd goes wild, and we go down in fame for the greatest season finale yet.”

“Sounds nice,” the referee replied, “*until* you remember we have no script for that! Or choreography!”

The Duchess said nothing at being ridiculed. Rather, she merely glanced in the referee's direction, and the act of intimidation took full effect as the official shivered, as if on-command. Then the noble wrestler looked back towards her opponent and continued.

"Remember the scene we played out, the one with all our backup?"

"I do," Viper said, her smile becoming more uncomfortable and just as inappropriate.

"We'll follow that script," The Duchess replied. "Klaus is already in the ring, anyways. And I believe we instructed The Slimy Snakes to hide beneath the stage in-case their services were required."

The referee gulped as she looked up at The Duchess, and tried her best to sound as unimposing as possible. "Yes, it was a good call on your part to instruct the officials to position The *Slithering* Snakes beneath the stage. I think if you're both okay with that, we can make it work."

"Hey, but just checking," Viper snapped. "In this version, I lunge at you in the end, bite you with my 'poisonous fangs,' and you go down. You *do* realize that you'd be breaking character if you do anything else, right? When I bite you, your character's *dead*."

Her opponent said nothing, so Viper grabbed her by the neck to force an answer. Even so, The Duchess maintained her composure, as if she weren't already grabbed, twisted, and slammed against the floor of the ring countless times on this night alone. The reptilian fighter grew tired of this failed interrogation and let go. Once she let go of The Duchess' throat, she spun towards Klaus, taking the mic from his hand in a single twirling motion. She took it so easily from his log-like arms, so effortlessly as if he were just handing it to her.

“Laaaaadies and gentlemen,” she beckoned to the crowd, winking at the end of the first word. “Now that I’ve claimed the champion’s belt, I wish to challenge this ‘Duchess’ to a rematch—this time, a grudge match!”

The referee examined both combatants’ faces. She could read the room and easily see how much they wanted to fight. The audience was cheering for their champion—and the hero in this saga—and knew she’d be in deep trouble if she didn’t grant the fans their encore.

“In that case, a grudge match we shall have! With the title right on the line! And what says The Duchess?”

A smile sprawled on the woman’s face. She brushed her white wig to fix her hair and cracked her knuckles, eyeing the audience. “Then let them eat cake,” she replied.

With that, the bell rang again, signaling the fighters to get in their respective corners. Klaus stood in the center of the ring, merely observing the fight alongside the referee. Viper swung her arms over the ropes, letting them hang like snakes falling from the sleeves of her leotard. She made eyes at The Duchess, who smirked with a look of assured victory, same as earlier when she cleanly lost. Yet even now, Viper was shaking. She tried to incorporate it into the flow of her body, hoping to hide the hesitation from her audience as she ruminated why she decided to risk some accidental injury doing a petty grudge match that wouldn’t actually change the results of the match.

Amidst the roars of the crowd, the referee called for the match to begin. Viper dashed at The Duchess and slammed her weight against her. She put everything into taking down the dress-clad ice queen, using her “Eel fingers” technique. While pushing against The Duchess with her body weight and one arm, she used the other to hold behind her opponent’s back and start

sliding her fingers to attack her pressure points. Viper did the same with her first arm, finding a comfortable patch of soft flesh just above the navel.

The Duchess expected this approach, as it was all in the script they had fervently rehearsed at one point. It was difficult to maintain balance when high heels were a part of her costume. As such, she bounced around the ring entirely on her toes, using the heels as a weapon only when necessary. She bearhugged Viper and redistributed her weight so they both leaned on one another in a complete deadlock.

But just then, Viper immediately pulled away, shaking as she withdrew from the tussle in a single jagged motion. The audience started booing as soon as they could see them: the prized utensils that The Duchess carried for her “meals.” A knife and fork, intricately designed with her family crest on the hilt, were held firmly in her hands. She stretched her arm behind her and, with the blunt side of her fork, jabbed the hand that Viper used to slither along her back.

“I do apologize,” The Duchess said. “I haven’t eaten in so long, but I believe I’ve forgotten my manners. Klaus!” She clapped her hands together, and Klaus carried to her a small saucer of water. The royalty slipped off her gloves and dipped them in the water, staring Viper in the eyes. “It is *proper* for a lady to rinse her hands before a meal.”

Bitch, Viper thought to herself. Even though the royal fighter was in-character, it was apparent to Viper from working with her that The Duchess enjoyed hurting her mercilessly. But despite her discovery, the snakish wrestler kept her plastic smile and laughed. “Thanks for reminding me, Duchess. I still haven’t eaten either!”

Once more, Viper dashed at The Duchess and used her slender fingers to grasp her tummy. “You want to know how Isabelle’s mine?” she asked before breathily suckling the

royalty's pale neck. She was going off-script, but between the unprecedented situation and Viper's own desire to prove the sincerity of her relationship, she felt more than justified to do so. "I gave her a mark just like yours. They're nonpoisonous... for now. Take it as the mark of my prey!"

The Duchess withstood this bite like she was ignoring a mosquito, instead grinding the utensils in her hands against one another to emphasize the sharp clanging sounds. "I've had duck, meat, goose, and lobster," she began. "But I can't say I've tasted viper." She thrust her fork forward, but Viper cleverly stepped away, receiving no more than a scratch on her abdomen.

The reptile began to taunt her opponent but heard rumbling behind her. It was the hulking frame of Klaus ramming towards her with his arms outstretched. Viper got on her stomach and rolled out of the way, realizing he'd be much slower if he were to crouch on the ground.

"We've got a two-on-one situation folks!" the referee called. "I wonder how this is going to impact the match!"

"We've been fighting this whole time," Viper said to her opponent. "Klaus must've been the one to hurt my Isabelle—I could never forgive you for this!"

"My Isabelle was bitten by you as you've already admitted." Unlike Viper, who stuttered every time she went off-script, The Duchess was far more natural when it came to improv, almost to the point that she had every possible scenario memorized. "Surely, one of your slimy friends were responsible for hitting her face. Where are they, anyway?"

The combatants' dialogue captivated the audience. The women oohed at the growing anticipation of this mystery. The guys texted their boys to "check this shit out." Suddenly, the lights dimmed, and smoke blew from beneath the stage. One by one, figures emerged from

beneath the stage, crawling up violently like Hell spawn that have melted in lava, until three of them surrounded the stage. Right on-cue with The Duchess' line, *they* appeared.

“Did you call on us?” the biggest one asked. “The Slithering Snakes?”

The Duchess turned around in fake surprise to see that the muscular Cobra already had Klaus in a chokehold. Serpent, lean and facially menacing, was staring him right in the eyes—she was impeccable at detecting movement so long as she had a clear gaze of her opponent. And then there was the smallest snake, Eel, flickering with her shock collar as she prodded his body.

“He’s not twitching enough,” Eel shouted. “More, *more!*”

She ripped off his jacket and shirt to reveal his rippling abs. Most notably in the middle of his chest was a hawk, with its wings fully outstretched. Cobra laughed in a deep bellow as she observed. “Doesn’t this fool know that snakes can eat hawks? Let’s see if we can clip his wings.” She pulled his arms further and further back, and Klaus yelled in an aggravating response. The crowd cheered for this torture, considering any friend of The Duchess an enemy of theirs. None of them cared that it was like cheering for execution. In their heads, he deserved it.

“Now,” Viper said, “This is the end! Enjoy my Poisonous Fangs!”

She gyrated on her stomach as she quickly approached The Duchess for the last time. This would be the part where Viper bites The Duchess and poisons her, resulting in the distinguished woman’s “death.” The script was amended for that very reason: she was so popular of a character despite her heel status, that instead it was decided that she would merely be defeated and return the following season. The fact that The Duchess was fine with letting her character be killed was just so astonishing to everyone involved. Even Viper, as she jumped at

The Duchess, tingled at the possibility she could mess up this stunt and allow The Duchess to live. It would mess up the entire scene.

The Duchess, however, did not look at Viper, a small detail that contradicted the script. She was looking at her servant in pity, leaving her neck—still freshly wounded from Viper’s previous bite—widely exposed to the finishing attack. The green woman snapped up like an animal, her arms stuck to her sides as she leapt up with the full weight of her body.

But the blood-hungry reptile didn’t taste blood. She felt it. Looking down, Viper saw in horror the tips of the fork piercing the skin in her chest. The ever-vigilant Viper could hear her heartbeat racing and brushed a hand over her chest. The puncture from the fork still hurt. Not physically, but the script called that anyone “stabbed” in the heart would be dead in the ring. She dropped like a noodle, going limp with the fork still pierced lightly into her skin as droplets of blood trickled out. The character known as “Viper” was now dead.

The crowd was silent, but The Slithering Snakes didn’t let go. They cried, recognizing that their vivacious leader existed no longer. The script said they were supposed to win, and they talked about retiring after this fight. All they could do was continue with the match, performing each command while trying to suppress the elephant in the room that their friend’s career was now over. The Duchess betrayed them, and they wanted to take revenge by hurting the smug royalty’s butler.

Cobra gripped Klaus’ arms tighter as Eel stung him and Serpent watched. The butler looked at his master and saw that she won her fight. “The script can actually change,” he thought to himself. He struggled to outstretch his wings as Cobra’s burly arms had him tightly confined. The audience’s silence gave him hope, as it was the sign that they recognized The Duchess’

power, and by extension, his. So he lifted his wings against the twisted position in which he was crippled, cracking his muscles as he bellowed an honest, agonizing cry. Serpent twitched and backed away as he took a step forward, his position unsteady as the zaps from Eel left him dizzy. But with every step, his footing became firmer, and it was the only sound in the venue besides The Duchess telling him to hurry up. Viper didn't dare move.

With exponential haste, Klaus migrated from a crawl to a sprint, carrying Cobra on his back and clutching the others in his tree trunk arms. He leapt off the stage with the snakes holding on for dear life before slamming the lot of them against the cold floor just outside the ring. One of the audience members not paying attention to the plot started cheering wildly, but his friends quickly told him to shut up.

"Very good," The Duchess said to Klaus. As she began to walk away, reality set on the referee that the match was over, and *this* was the result.

Klaus looked down at his opponents, then at his tattoo. "Snakes may be a risky prey for hawks," he told them, "but they can still get caught. Remember that." He followed his master, plucking the fork off Viper's body as he moved toward the changing room. Viper whimpered slightly when she felt the metal removed from her body but made sure to keep it inaudible.

Meanwhile, the paramedics were so captivated by the fight that they sometimes forgot they were attending to Isabelle. One asked the other how she was doing, but to their surprise, she was gone.

The Duchess paced towards the locker room in a dignified march, though she couldn't help but chuckle. Klaus walked silently behind her, proud of his work but aware he was only the closing act to a performance larger than him.

"You did great, babe!" Isabelle giggled, pushing herself towards The Duchess' arm.

"And *your* performance was impeccable," she replied. "You tantalized Viper perfectly."

The bite mark on Isabelle's neck was certainly deep, a sign of the intense feelings Viper had for her. "Poor thing didn't know it was all a trick," The Duchess snickered. "But we needed to give a motive painful enough to her ego to challenge us to a rematch. The script we were currently running left me no room to provide *my* lethal blow. Performing a grudge match allowed us to use the old one, where Viper left herself open by lunging at me."

Isabelle nodded along encouragingly, still impressed by the intelligence that this woman clearly possessed. Klaus, however, was distracted from his admiration by Isabelle's bloody nose.

"I told you we could've faked the blood," Klaus said. "Did it hurt?"

"Well, as I told *you*," Isabelle fired back with a smile, "I'm not against feeling a little pain." She used her finger and gingerly poked at the last traces of blood as they dried on her face. "I took a numbing agent from the paramedics when they weren't working, so I'm fine now. But *wow*, what a rush!"

"I just worry about you overdoing it," The Duchess said, flashing a grin and pecking a kiss on her girlfriend's neck, right over Viper's bite mark. "That said, I earnestly appreciate your cooperation. That snake's been a threat to my career for a while now. But now that she's dead, *nobody* will get in my way!"

She laughed at her brilliant plan, flailing her knife and fork wildly like a spoiled brat playing magician. She slashed Isabelle's cheek by mistake and got her utensils confiscated by Klaus. The Duchess apologized quickly but her girlfriend merely laughed it off. The audience would never be able to tell what's real and what's fake.