

**Chapter 6** – *Attest to the Rest*

Megan's eyes shot open. She peered in the dark, unsure of where she was. The only sound she heard was a low rhythmic wheezing heard over her shoulder. Then she remembered. Her nightmare became reality and the loving family she visited during the night, was only a dream. The newcomer remained completely still. Was her eyes adjusting or, was it first morning light that changed the blackness to shades of gray?

Curious, Megan slowly rolled over to see whose breathing she heard. It was Titus. His great chest rose and fell to the rhythm. When a light hand touched her shoulder, she jumped and nearly screamed. Seeing Kasha, she caught the cry in her throat. The shadow warrior walked to the door flap, pulled it aside, and waited for Megan to follow.

Swinging her legs over the side, Megan blindly groped for her shoes. She hurriedly put them on and rushed to get past the small opening Kasha had made for them. The cool morning air hit her and she wrapped her arms around herself as she turned around. The ground was wet from the night rain and bits of mist hugged the hillside. Kasha quietly lowered the flap, and then motioned for Megan to follow her to the bathhouse.

Eyeing Kasha, Megan whispered, "You need me to help you?" Kasha shook her head in annoyance.

Megan trailed Kasha who sprinted up the steps of the bathhouse and headed for the right entrance. This room was of similar design to the other one. In the center of the room was another huge bowl. Lower and wider, Megan could see its contents fizzing. The left wall was bare. The right however, was lined with three stalls. The partitions were suspended from the back and were slanted away from the room's entrance.

Kasha ducked into the last one and Megan watched her feet stop and turn around. Megan peered around the partition into the stall next to Kasha's and found a tear drop shaped shelf carved out of the wall itself with a hole in it. She needed to make use of faculties and as matter of habit, looked around for toilet paper. Finding none, the newcomer peered down and found the same fizzing substance gurgling softly up to the rim of the hole.

When Kasha finished, she left her stall, and walked over to the giant tureen in the center. Irritated, she called over her shoulder. "Just go."

Slightly mortified, Megan did what she was told. Afterwards, she found she was clean and dry. When she came out, she saw Kasha splashing liquid from the cauldron on her face. When she stood back, her face and hands were also clean and dry. The warrior gestured Megan to do the same and growled, "Do not ask." Then added as a matter-of-factly, "I would not drink from it, though that cretin, Pierce would say (Kasha made an attempt to mimic the bowman) it's the closest damn thing to a gin and tonic."

They both walked outside and stood between the pillars. It was now fairly light outside yet the sun remained obscured by the cloud cover that had returned. Kasha rested her hands on her hips and took in several deep breaths through her nose and exhaled from her mouth.

Looking to Megan, "We start by running. We'll go over the hill (nodding that way) then follow the stream that cuts across the meadow. We will cross the marsh and that will bring us to the Flats. We will begin our combat training within the Basin. Try to keep up. Ready?"

Megan had to ask, "What about your wounds?"

Frowning, Kasha unhooked the two top clasps on her jersey with one hand and pulled back what covered her shoulder with the other hand. She revealed nothing more than a spot of

discolored skin where the arrow puncture used to be. As she redressed, she looked to Megan and sternly repeated, “Ready?”

Megan wanted to say no, but nodded instead. Kasha instantly leaped from the stairs and took off into a full run. Megan clambered down the steps and chased after her. Surprisingly, her legs moved smoothly and swiftly. Once she reached the cobbled path, she picked up her pace.

When Kasha reached the foot of the hill, she slowed, checked her breathing, and adjusted to the incline. Megan was not far from her. The newcomer did not attempt to pass, but stayed close behind; matching Kasha’s speed and endurance.

Half of Kasha was delighted to have such a promising adversary; the other half (given the short time the newcomer has been here) grew concerned that Megan could be a real threat. The shadow warrior would not go back on her word, but this will be the only time she will instruct Megan. Stopping atop the hill they had just climbed, Kasha checked her breathing again. Satisfied with her performance, the warrior smiled. She glanced at Megan and the corners of her mouth dropped. Although Megan’s breathing was somewhat labored, she had barely broke a sweat; suggesting that only her technique was an issue.

Huffing, Megan exclaimed, “That was some hike up, (swallowing) I could use some water.”

Kasha stood tall and pointed to some bare rock some fifty meters away. “Those rocks are next to the stream. We’ll get a drink there. I challenge you to be the first to reach them.” Without warning, she was off, leaping off the main path making a bee line to the rocks. Megan did the same but stumbled after the first few steps. The ground was pitted and rocky under the foliage. She feared if she wasn’t careful, she would twist her ankle or worse. Getting up she tried to map

the least difficult path. Meanwhile, Kasha had stopped a third of the way and was smirking up at her, “Is that fear I see again?!”

Defiantly, Megan yelled back, “NOOO! It’s caution!”

Kasha called back before taking off again, “Sounds personal.”

Angerly, Megan jumped back onto the cobbled path and followed it down the hill. Her confidence grew and she let go. With the help of the sloping hillside, she quickly achieved top speed. Her legs moved sure and fast. When Megan reached the point that she had to leave the pathway, she jumped as far as she could to gain ground and continued on with leaps and bounds.

At the same time, Kasha looked back and her eyes went wide. Megan was practically airborne. She cursed under her breath, “che!” and leaped forward taking wider strides, hoping she knew the terrain well enough. Her stealth abilities were of no use when running away from the opponent.

Coming up to the top of the hill, Titus spotted the two racing down the other side. They were both off the path and it was clear that Megan was gaining on Kasha. He grunted before heading off to the Neutral Ground, “Humph. Go Megan.”

When Kasha came upon the rocks, she knew she would not be able to stop. Megan was right behind her, hollering, “Look out!” The shadow warrior thrust out her hands and sprung from the ground. She somersaulted over them and landed on her feet in the stream facing Megan’s direction. The newcomer braced herself and hit the tallest rock to stop. THUD! She bounced back and fell down landing on her bottom with a THUMP.

Kasha laughed at the bewildered woman, “Not bad, Megan. However, you need work on your finish.” Then she crouched down and drank from the shallow stream.

Megan fell back to lie down as she tried to catch her breath. Looking up at the sky, she wondered why she wasn't in real pain. In fact, the discomfort of the bumpy ground bothered her the most. Getting her second wind, she stood up and walked over to the water's edge and knelt down to drink. At first she cupped her hands and drew the water to her lips. The effort was not fast enough and her mouth ended up going directly to the source. The newcomer took in several deep gulps before satisfying her thirst. When she was done she sat back on her haunches, wiped her mouth on her shirt sleeve, and tightened her shoe laces.

Startled, Megan found Kasha standing in front of her to offer her a hand up. "How did you—"

"Ha! One you will have to figure out on your own." Kasha pulled Megan up, turned and, began to walk down stream. "You will find all of us have special abilities...abilities we are not willing to share." She checked to see if Megan was following and caught the woman hopping from rock to rock to avoid the water. Rolling her eyes, Kasha looked ahead and continued, "For a newcomer, your strength and speed are remarkable. I'm curious as to what you did in your past life to maintain such athletic abilities."

"I'm a bit baffled myself. I've become somewhat sedentary since my daughter was born."

"How long ago?"

"She's about eight"

"Months?"

"Years."

Kasha clamped her mouth shut and suppressed her astonishment. "What did you do athletically before childbirth?"

Running out of stepping stones, Megan reluctantly jumped in the water and waded a few paces behind Kasha. The shallow stream had fanned out becoming a wide avenue of rippling water over pebble and sand. “I did a little hiking, biking, and rollerblading on occasion. I like to ski...water and snow.”

“Did you compete?”

“No, just recreational stuff.”

“Did you participate in any sports at all?”

“Hmm, well I played basketball in grade school, oh, and I took Karate in high school, but I—“

“What art?”

“Oh. Uh, drawing, and phot—“

“No, what kind of Karate?”

“TKD”

“Korean Taekwondo?”

“Yeah.”

“What belt?”

“Green”

“Why did you stop?”

“I don’t know, I guess I wanted to hang with my friends.”

“Did your friends stay with you?”

“No.”

They came to a point where the stream forked and then broke out into many that weaved through low grassy mounds. Kasha hopped several of them and stopped on one that rose above

the others. She turned to watch Megan land behind her, who had to steady herself. The shadow warrior smiled and pointed ahead of her, “Your balance left you also. Now we will see what happened to your martial art abilities.”

Kasha leaped again and again with Megan following, until the water all but disappeared and a plain of grass stretch ahead. They ran again with Megan remaining several paces behind. She was studying Kasha. Studying her running technique and concentrated to match her pace. Soon they reached the edge of the plain, and looked upon what was called the “Flats.”

The green grass and young trees that lined the marsh, gave way to a barren plain that was surrounded by rock formations in the distance. Further still, Megan saw snow capped mountains. Kasha slowed to a half walk. The ground felt solid to the step. They approached what looked to be an impression in the ground. The area reminded Megan of a gigantic shallow crater; some fifteen meters in diameter and three meters deep. “The Basin.” Kasha didn’t hesitate but jumped in, half sliding and running to the bottom. Then she walked towards the center, stretching her arms and neck as she did so. With more caution, Megan meandered down to the bottom.

Circling around, Kasha faced Megan and called to her, “Show me what you remember of your martial arts training.”

Feeling conscientious, Megan lazily mimicked the first Kata she had learned as a white belt. She hesitated, repeated and corrected her movements.

“STOP!” Megan froze in a half attempted fighting stance. “I know this Kata. Watch.” Kasha drew her fisted arms tight under her armpits, widen her gait, and thrust her fists down in front of her into a ready stance. She slowly went through each block and strike, flawlessly and ended with a shout. “Now you.”

Megan took a deep breath and readied again. Although her technique was still irregular and sluggish, the routine came back to her, and she was able to complete the kata without hesitation. Out of habit of self practice, she ended back at the beginning stance and Kasha ordered, “Again.”

Megan went for the first block, turned to her left and suddenly found Kasha thrusting a kick to her shin as Megan blocked down. Finding she had successfully blocked the attack, she smirked, and followed through by raising her left fist, followed by a right jab to Kasha face. Kasha dodged and seemly disappeared. Megan found her when she looked over her shoulder. She quickly turned and they repeated the sequence.

This was the first time Megan actually had a true opponent to fully understand the kata’s strategy. The kata routines themselves are configured for many opponents attacking you at once which Megan when taught, had to envision. Kasha was providing Megan with a real target. Ending, Megan triumphantly stood with feet together and bowed to Kasha.

Smirking, Kasha responded with a slight nod, “Once more. This time I will not wait for you to be ready.” Megan’s self gratification was immediately snuffed. Kasha attacked, and at the beginning of the fourth sequence of moves, Megan’s concentration was shattered as Kasha landed a kick, sending her to the ground. Megan sat up and rubbed her leg.

Kasha put out her hand, “Get up warrior. Rest is for the weak.” A meek smile graced Megan’s lips hearing her being called warrior and with Kasha’s help, got up. “Next kata.”

“But shouldn’t I master this one first.”

“No. This is not real fighting but mind and body exercises. We will go through each kata that you know five times. Then we move on. Ready?”

Damian woke with a gasp. He was lying flat on his back, clutching at his chest, and wildly staring at the canvas roof above. Daylight fused with the white cloth which provided adequate lighting within the tent. He was with them in his dreams again; helplessly watching the sleepless woman and her lifeless son. A drop of sweat rolled down his forehead to end in the nook of his ear. He long for all this to be over...for the torment in his heart to end.

Hearing the rustle of covers, Damian jerked his head up and saw Mayon watching him as the weasel stepped out of bed. “Damn. The way you were clutching your chest, I thought you were having a heart attack.” Damian immediately released his grasp and sat up defiant. Mayon murmured as he looked away, “Pity.”

In no mood for banter, Damian glanced around. They were the only two left in the barracks. God, he hated Mayon. From the first day he laid eyes on him barely a week ago he felt nothing but contempt for the bastard. There was something deep that tugged at his soul about Mayon. It was as if he should know him but the connection continued to elude him. One thing was for certain, if he had met Mayon before, he didn’t like him then and he certainly doesn’t now.

Rage blossomed within and Damian jumped on top of his bed and lunged at Mayon, slamming them both against the tent side. The tyrant shoved his forearm into the back of Mayon’s neck, pinning the half standing man’s face against the taunt canvas. “Of all the miserable, worthless, losers that reside here, I despise you the most,” hissed Damian and shoved him, pressing his head further. “Do you realize how lucky you really are now that the last recruit is here?” As if expecting an answer the tyrant shoved him again, “Do you?!” Growling, Damian stepped back, letting Mayon fall to his knees. Turning away he stared down at the palms of his hands and vacantly added, “Once I fight her, this will all come to an end.” Glancing at the open

doorway, he spotted Jimmy and Timmy. The fear of him (he had hoped never to see again) had returned in their eyes.

Damian coldly looked away and went back to his bed to retrieve his boots and gloves. Grabbing them, he headed outside; the two boys hurriedly backed away to clear his path. They huddled against the tent as he walked by. Damian called over his shoulder, “Care to join me for breakfast, boys?” Their fear left them and they stared dumbfounded at each other. Damian has never asked anyone to join him in anything, let alone eat with him. They doggedly followed him around to the back.

Damian smiled as his last threat to Mayon implicated itself in his mind. He thought, ‘just one more day.’ The tyrant pondered if he should venture to fight Megan after his bout with Titus. Sitting down, he roll tapped his fingers on the table then slammed them down, palms flat. Why wait? His suffering could actually end today. Looking down at his forming food, his mind raced while the twins got situated. “Ha!” The boys jumped a little but remained seated and stared at the smirking man. “This will be the day, boys! A good day...” Then he winked at them, “A very good day.”

Mayon stood around the corner. He froze when he heard the smack of Damian’s hands and watched for him to come around the corner. When he heard ‘this will be the day...’ the blood drained from his face. He wasn’t sure why Damian fighting the last recruit was so important, but the last thing Mayon wanted was for it to be over. He was just getting started.

Sensing the weasel near, Damian swallowed, washed down the food with a drink, and called to him, “Mayon! Be a good old boy and go fetch Titus, will you?”

Growling, Mayon replied, “Why should I?”

“Hmm, I see your point. Forget I asked.” Looking to the twins, “Jim, Tim do you know if Titus has eaten anything this morning?” The twins stared at the man in disbelief. Was Damian conversing with them? They both shook their heads and Damian continued with an exaggerated, “NO? Excellent! It would be to my favor if Titus fights on an empty stomach.” Timmy didn’t like Titus being at a disadvantage and attempted to leave the table. Damian quickly grabbed the boy by the arm and sent a warning look to Jimmy. He smirk, “I think its better that you two stay here with me.” Mischievously, he winked, “I wouldn’t want you to warn him that I will not wait.”

They heard Mayon snort and then someone running hard up the cobbled path.

Damian looked back at his meal and began to eat again. “You know, you should chew your food a minimum of twenty-five times for proper digestion....essential when engaging in any strenuous activity afterwards.” The tyrant would take his time and enjoy this meal. Titus had to be prepared to fight; no other way would be accepted.



Propping her hands on her knees, Megan swallowed and continued panting. She was wet with sweat and her joints and muscles hurt.

Kasha stood near in a much better state. “What else do you know?”

Megan glanced through wet strands of hair and grumbled, “Uh-I know (swallowing) bo.”

“Bo?! You were taught weapons?”

“Just bo.” Megan attempted to stand straight and her stomach let out a growl. “Can we eat first...please?”

Kasha momentarily eyed the woman, “Very well” then began to walk towards the basin’s wall.

Happy that they were taking a break, Megan followed. She staggered a few paces, steadied, and then worked to find the strength to get out of this hole.

In the distance, Pierce was sitting in the tallest and closest tallest tree he could find near the flats. His keen eyesight saw little, catching glimpses of the training warriors now and again when they moved towards the far side of the basin. When he saw Kasha appear on top of the rim, he jumped down and landed in front of Hillary. She was sitting against the tree with her eyes closed. His movements did not disturb her.

Annoyed, Pierce planted his hands on his hips. “Hey! They’re moving.”

Hillary sighed, opened her eyes and answered quietly, “I know.” She rose slowly and brushed her backside.

Pierce waited to walk back with the redhead. “I didn’t see much. Did you get anything?”

“She’s very strong; fast; quick learner; her confidence is growing; but...” Hillary paused and looked towards the moving warriors that were crossing the Flats.

“But what?”

Starting to walk, gliding absently in thought, Hillary murmured, “She feels...”

Pierce eagerly at her side pried for more, “Feels what?!”

Hillary eyes narrowed at the newcomer and with a tinge of resentment admitted, “Everything.”

“What the hell is that’s supposed to mean?!”

Hillary cocked a brow at the bowman, “You figure it out.”

Pierce hissed through his teeth and mumbled, “I will.” Looking to Megan he raised his scarred fist and added louder, “You bet your ass I will!”

Hillary chuckled, “If I were a betting man...” She pointed at a clump of fallen hardwoods to the right, “You are missing some prime wood for your arrows. I hope you saved the heads.”

“What do you take me for? I’m not an idiot.”

Hillary smiled as she watched Kasha and Megan disappear from view. “Do you have them with you?” Knowing she would be alone soon, Hillary started to look for a good spot to meditate before the fight.

“No, they’re in the barracks with my...holy shit!” Pierce took off like a light; he had to get back to the barracks before Kasha did.

Reaching the grassy mounds, Hillary soon heard the calming sound of trickling water. She walked over to one of the rises that had a tree growing on it. The grass under the shaded area was not as tall and the tree branches provided cover. Stooping, Hillary took the last few steps to reach the base of the tree. A slight but strange sensation tingled her foot and she stopped. She pulled her smock aside and slowly lifted her step.

A dispiriting “oh” escaped her lips and she picked up the tiny flower; it’s delicate blue pedals crushed by the treading woman. Wherever she went, Hillary tried so hard not to disturb the beauty that grew under her feet. Her constant struggle against gravity was not without shortcomings. Though it seemed she could float over ground, she did not. Nearly each step was focused, balanced and precise; affording the least amount of contact. Occasionally, her step would falter.

With a sigh, the Boob eased carefully to the ground in a crisscross fashion. She cupped her hands around the withered bloom, closed her eyes and bowed her head as to mourn its loss. Then she whispered, “What if...” and concentrated on recalling what she studied in biology.

Titus lay on his back with his eyes closed. His body was drenched in sweat but his breathing was calm. Like an unseen layer, the scent of clover flowers perfumed the air just above the ground. It reminded him of summer mornings in the country, bees humming about, and grandma's honey. It was not good for him to think of food just now, so he set his mind to go over his confrontations with Damian. He mentally critiqued his counters to the tyrant's attacks attempting to pinpoint advantages and weaknesses. After all, Damian was no more a man than himself accept...shorter. Titus smiled.

"This is no time to be dreaming. (Huff, huff) Damian's waiting," grumbled Mayon.

Titus squinted up at the winded visitor. He raised his hand for Mayon to help him up. Both knew Mayon's strength was far from reaching its full potential. He would have been of little help pulling up a mammoth creature such as Titus. "F—you," grunted Mayon, then he turned on his heels, and headed back to camp.

Titus stood-up and laughed, "Ha ha ha, auh, Mayon. Don't go away mad! I was just kidding!" Titus sniffed his armpits and called, "Do I offend?" His stomach gurgled and it occurred to Titus as to why Mayon came all this way. Titus was not ready for Damian. He started to walk and the more he thought, the faster his pace became. By the time he had reached Mayon, he was in a full run.

As Titus passed Mayon, he thanked the weasel who called sarcastically from behind, "Good luck!" and added, "Asshole," with less enthusiasm. Titus acknowledged the reply with a wave as he went on.

Standing in the shadow of the bathhouse pillar, Damian kept an eye on Titus as he put on his gloves. The giant had returned and went immediately to table. The twins were with Titus to keep him company.

Pierce re-appeared out of the barracks carrying his junk with him. The moron went over to sit on the other side of the giant. Damian frowned. How could they fraternize with one another and it not affect their combat. Maybe if they knew what he knew, it would be different. No, that was not possible. The outcome would be the same. Damian is and would always be the unsurpassable.

Sensing others approaching, Damian ducked behind the pillar and peered out of the shadows from the other side. Kasha and Megan were making their way down the pathway. Damian narrowed his vision and focused on the newcomer. Though his expression didn't show it, he was intrigued by her physical state. Her fatigue was less than expected. The tyrant knew better than to think they did little by way of training. Kasha's austere disposition commanded effort. More and more, Megan was becoming an enigma to him. No matter. There was no need to afford more thought on the subject. As far as he was concerned, she was history along with the rest.

Mayon appeared at the top of the ridge. He caught site of the two women and sprinted to catch up. Damian would have liked to avoid the weasel the duration of this day. Mayon however, was not cooperating. All the more reason to fight Megan as soon as possible... His eyes averted back to Titus. The trick was to get Titus down without expelling all of his energy. He must reserve enough for the newcomer if he was to end this today.

In actuality, Damian's first fight with Titus may have satisfied his standings, however, unbeknown to Titus, the rock slide that pinned him was not deliberate, and the tyrant's conscience disallowed his claim of victory. Regardless, Titus was not the same man he fought months ago...and neither was he.

Smirking, Damian began to slowly make his way to the now crowded table. Kasha, Megan and Mayon had joined the hopeless fools. He felt the need to draw their attention away from Titus. After all, the giant should be allowed to eat his last divine meal in peace.

Rushing to rid the food in his mouth, Titus swallowed hard before speaking, “Hey, nice of you guys to join me. This is better than a tailgate party.”

“Oh, I don’t know...” Pierce put his palms down on the table, brought his face close to the surface and shouted, “An ice cold beer would be nice!” Nothing happened and he sat back in disgust, mumbling, “Purist.”

Titus chuckled with his next bite half chewed in his mouth. Megan and Kasha sat down to the right of Pierce and their breakfast appeared before them. The newcomer immediately dug in, her appetite getting the best of her manners.

As Mayon took his seat next to Megan he looked over to Kasha, “How’s the training going, Kasha?” The shadow warrior grunted in response and began to eat. He would not get anything out of her. He frowned then turned to Megan his demeanor immediately became more upbeat, “How goes it, Megan?”

“Good.”

All except Kasha looked at her with slight astonishment. Mayon pried further, “You feeling better today?”

Megan took a drink before shrugging, “I’m not going to sit around and wait for the sky to fall.”

Titus leaned forward to look over at the newcomer. “That’s the spirit Megan. What do you say we go a few rounds after I take care of Damian? You know- nothing serious. It will be

just for kicks. I'd like to see what you got." Megan smiled over to Titus, nodded then went grim; her eyes averted to end of the table behind him.

Standing regal, with his arms crossed, Damian's eyes went from Megan to the back of Titus's head smirking. The giant glanced to see who was there though he had already guessed. Megan's eyes had dropped to stare at her food. Titus followed suite and returned to finishing his meal. As Damian expected, an uncomfortable silence followed as the losers waited for him to respond.

Jimmy caused Damian to raise a brow towards the young one, who spoke up. Quietly at first, then with more assurance, "Uh, do you mind if we watch...er...the fight I mean?" Timmy grabbed his brother's hand under the table.

"You should ask the one who's at stake here. What say you Titus? Would an audience distract you?"

The big man looked straight ahead; chewing in thought. He swallowed, ran his tongue between his upper gum and lip, and then sucked air between his teeth. "As long as they stay out of the way. I don't want anyone getting hurt."

Damian snorted, "Humph. Someone will get hurt, that I guarantee. Only, it won't be the bystanders."

Titus eyed the earnest boys, "You know the rules- Stay clear of the fight; No interference, no matter what; No distractions, no rooting (winking) unless it's for me of course!"

Damian firmly gripped Jimmy's shoulder to secure his attention, "No crying either. If it becomes too much for you, leave. Do you understand?" He looked sternly at each of them. The twins looked to one another and deliberated in silence. Then they both turned back to Damian and simultaneously nodded once.

“Very well then.” Damian noticed Titus stretching his last bit of food. He dropped his arms and announced, “It’s time.” Without waiting, he began to walk to the cobbled path.

Pierce called over, “Hey! I want to see too!” He jumped up and started to follow his bow and quiver causing an unruly commotion.

Titus stood up and called, “Damian, where are we fighting?”

Titus’s question prompted Damian to pause. The place was chosen but his generous mood this morning prompted him to offer the choice to Titus. Damian cocked his ear towards the giant. “Are you calling it?”

“Drop Zone.”

“Accepted...Don’t keep me waiting.” Damian headed on, with the excited boys running ahead and Pierce trailing behind.

Titus looked over to Kasha and Megan, “Well ladies, wish me luck?” He did not overlook Mayon. The man was busy chowing down and seemed disinterested.

Kasha gazed at her food, “Luck has nothing to do with it.” Then she looked at the giant with a glint in her eye and added, “You have my favor, cretin.”

Finishing her meal, Megan sheepishly asked, “Can I come along?” Mayon eyed the newcomer then went back to eating.

Kasha glared at her, “You are to forgo your training to watch a bloodbath?”

Megan swallowed hard, “I want to root for Titus too.” She pulled each leg over the bench and warmly smiled at Titus. “It’s the least I can do. Besides, wouldn’t it be training to see my opponent in action?”

Suddenly, Timmy ran around the side of the barracks, “Um, Titus? Damian thinks maybe you have had a change of heart and would prefer to battle here.”

“Oh no! I’m right behind you kiddo.” Following the boy, Titus headed past the table and cleared the tent before looking back at Megan. He wanted to be sure Damian could see that he was coming. He waved to her to follow, “Mustn’t keep the Kingpin waiting.”

Mayon slammed his drink down. Once again the bastard was referenced as their dignitary. He glared at Titus and barked, “Remember Titus, he will be nothing once you beat the crap out of him. Just make sure you do it.” The giant smiled and returned a thumbs-up, then gently lead Megan ahead of him to follow Timmy.

Kasha glanced at Mayon then returned to finishing her meal. After swallowing another bite, she voiced an observation. “You lack trust in Titus.”

“I trust no one.”

“I meant you do not believe that Titus will prevail.”

“Ha! You got that right.”

“Then why do you depend on others to do your battles?”

Mayon stopped his next bite before reaching his mouth. “I’ve been here less than a week.” He eyed the shadow warrior carefully. “How do expect me to fight?”

The woman thoughtfully gazed ahead then picked up the remaining piece of food and quietly said, “Simply... Try.”

Mayon hissed back, “I did try and that f—er broke my nose and kicked my teeth in.” He touched his front teeth then added lightly, “I didn’t know teeth grew back.” Then he grew stern again, “What chance do I have when he is months ahead of me?”

Kasha got up and braced her arms on the table and looked over to Mayon, “Lucky for us, you don’t try.” She pushed herself off and started to walk away.

Before taking his last bite, Mayon murmured, “Oh, you’ll see me try alright. Nothing is coming to an end.”

Hearing his remark, Kasha stopped and curiously asked, “What end do you speak of, Blackguard?”

Jerking himself up, Mayon headed her way and growled, “There is no point in mulling over fairytales.” He passed Kasha and sprinted towards the hill. He thought he try to catch-up with the others. His mind churned with his pace. ‘According to what Damian implied, Megan was the key...no key...no end...No end...means time...time to change...change everything...everything to my way...My way...or the highway...’ Mayon chuckled to himself.

Grimly, Kasha watched as Mayon made his way over the hill. Taking in a few deep breaths, she started out walking, and then started to trot. She was not one to pass up an opportunity to see the two leading contenders in action.

Unlike the others, she tried several times to better Damian. Each time she was brought to her knees and forced to concede. Her goal in fighting was not necessarily to win; they were lessons in skills to be had...and she did well to master them. After their first battle, Damian goaded her to fight him and each time, she accepted without hesitation. Their last confrontation was brutal; it took Kasha several days to recover. But that was weeks ago and he has not challenged her again. She smirked at the thought. The shadow warrior was catching up and Damian knew it. Seeing the tyrant in action from the sidelines became too appealing. This thought sparked her enthusiasm and before she knew it, she had passed a cursing Mayon, headed right, along the hill’s ridge, and came upon the second entourage right before they reached the Drop Zone.