

New Rome

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Darius looked up at the podium with disdain. He hated Marcus for forcing him to kill. He was tired of fighting strangers to the death for the amusement of the crowd. The opponent today was from an all-female coliseum in New Themyscira. Her long, black hair and bronzed skin showed her Italian heritage. Of course, he couldn't mention that. Italy didn't exist. She wore the basic gladiatorial attire. He could tell that her armor was crafted for her body. It fit all the contours of her body. It would allow her free movement without giving up defense. He was going to have to be careful with this one. Darius himself didn't use armor. His coliseum was not run by someone as wealthy as the owner of the New Themysciran coliseum. And he hated to have his movement restricted. The only protection Darius used was a bracer that ran the length of his right arm, a galerius for his shoulder, and a helmet that covered his face. She wore no helmet, and her hair was tied into a bun.

"Prepare yourselves for the most entertaining battle in this arena since its construction!" Marcus was giving his opening speech before the match.

How stupid is he going to feel when I refuse to fight? Darius thought to himself.

"Begin!" Marcus shouted into the mic.

The crowd started cheering and stomping so loud that the two gladiators could actually feel the ground move beneath their feet. The woman started to walk towards Darius, but stopped in surprise when Darius dropped his twin Gladius on the ground and raised both hands above his head, making a fist. This was the sign that a gladiator made when they refused to fight an enemy. This was considered either an insult to the gladiator's sponsor, or the challenger and their sponsor. It had to be handled by both parties before the fight could end or continue. Marcus and Bellona both rode the floating chariots down to the arena's floor. Darius still found it weird to find advanced technology in such an ancient civilization. They both hovered in the air, out of reach of the gladiators.

"What is the meaning of this?" asked Bellona.

"I refuse to fight a woman," Darius said.

Marcus chuckled; he found it very funny that this is where Darius would draw the line and put his foot down. He had foreseen this and already had an answer for him.

"I will handle this, Bellona. Darius does not mean to insult you or your gladiators. He just doesn't want to fight a woman. He knows very well how dangerous his opponent is. He just has some alien belief that he should not lay hands against a woman."

"Well, that is very strange," said Bellona, "and I don't care if he did not mean to insult. He has." Bellona looked over at her gladiator, "Diana, I expect his blood as payment for this insult."

"Yes, my lord," answered Diana in a very unemotional and robotic voice.

What the hell is up with her? Darius thought. *She hasn't shown any sign of life sense she got here. She just stares ahead with those soulless grey eyes.*

"Diana, do me a favor, please?" Marcus asked in his most condescending voice he could muster. "Tell him of your life in New Themyscira." He looked at Darius, "and after she is done, remember this: I will send Valerie there if you do not win." Marcus smiled and floated back to the podium, Bellona at his heels.

Diana looked at Darius, and he saw pain in her eyes. The first sign of emotion since he meet her. Darius was starting to dread what she was going to say. "The gladiators of New Themyscira are separated into two classes. New Roman citizens, and non-citizens. This you should already know because we are all separated into these two categories. The New Roman citizens are made famous and rich for every battle they win. They have personal trainers and schools. They are taken care of,



and they have their pick of males. Those, like me, who are not citizens of New Rome, are made into gladiators a different way. We are trained, yes, but we are toughened by abuse rather than training. When we get there, we are tied up outside of the city limits, naked. Men are allowed to do whatever they want with us. If we do not make it in to the city in three days, we are never allowed back in. We are given no weapons and are expected to survive. After that, we are trained and sent in to battle.” The pain that was in her eyes at the beginning has disappeared, replaced with anger. “Once a week we are tied up out there and forced to endure it again. Once a week for the rest of our lives!” Diana finished the last part screaming, partly because the crowd was getting restless and partly because of her anger. She took her spear off of her back and waited.

Darius was still in his original position. She would not attack until he had picked up his swords. Darius slowly put his hands down. He was thinking about what Marcus said. He could not allow Valerie to live through that. He crouched down and picked up his swords. The crowd started cheering again. Darius looked hard at Diana. She nodded. There would be no more words spoken until one of them was dead. Darius struck hard and fast. He swung one blade at her stomach, which she blocked with the base of her spear. He used his other sword to strike at her face diagonally. She blocked that with the shaft of her spear. She was now holding her spear diagonally. Darius jumped into the air and kicked out at her with both feet. Diana flew backwards, rolled, and jumped to her feet. She ran at him and vertically swiped at him while he was still on the ground. Darius caught the blade of her spear with his sword. The blade was barbed, so Darius hooked his sword into the blade and, using the momentum of her swipe, brought it down into the ground inches away from his face. He dropped his sword and grabbed the spear so that Diana could not easily pull it out of the ground. He pulled himself up with his left hand, and with his right, he stabbed out with his sword. His blade found its mark in Diana’s gut. The entire coliseum went quiet for a few seconds and then erupted into applause and cheer. Darius got up, threw his helmet to the ground, dropped down, and cradled Diana’s head in his lap.

“Thank you.” Diana whispered. She continued to look into his eyes as the light faded from hers. Tears started to fall from Darius’s eyes when she finally sighed her last breath. He looked up at the podium and saw that Bellona was smiling and shaking Marcus’s hand.

Marcus stood up and proclaimed to the crowd, “We have only seen the first of many battles to come. New Themyscira will run a gauntlet. Darius is to face all of the non-citizen, top-ranking gladiators they have over the week. 27 women will enter this arena, to either die by his sword or bathe in his blood.” The crowd cheered even harder. “And the next match will be inside of a bio dome, courtesy of Bellona!”

The crowd was so loud now that Darius would not be able to hear himself speak. He looked down at the woman whose life he had ended and thought about his soul. He wasn’t sure how much of it he had left, but he knew it wasn’t enough to survive killing that many women who were being treated like that. Darius decided that the time to escape was now, before he lost his humanity, and with it, Valerie.

