**A New Order**

It was a brand-new day at the Golden Nile. If anything, every day was a blessing ever since Hedj was hired to work at the agency two months ago. The male jackal was someone with lots of charisma as the Combagals working under the agency trained twice as hard for the opportunity to get his attention and compliments.

The former host always provided words of moral support, did favors for everyone, and delivered advice to improve their training routines. Even the other workers at the agency took a shining to them since he treated them to drinks after work or to dine at restaurants.

Furthermore, the jackal relocated to an apartment close to the agency so that he could be there on time. He even took advantage of his new living location to give the Golden Nile a few surprise visits during his days off.

However, nobody was happier for Hedj’s presence than Nubia. She was happy to have another black jackal in her agency. A male one at that too. It was as if having him around awoke a sleeping power within Nubia that was ready to spring out.

The jackal Combagal spent the last months doing matches and public appearances. She took the chance to improve her technique and increase her training. Her fanbase in Sonachi was increasing with every match as Nubia won every fight with style.

Every victory earned Nubia more fans, more prestige, and more attention from the media. She’d been doing more interviews than ever. Whereas before, she only had to do an interview every few months in the past. Now she had to do at least two or three interview per week. Not even during her early days as the Sonachi Champion did Nubia had such popularity. In a way, she was finally thriving as a champion.

The former host jackal was doing some paperwork. He watched each Combagal in Golden Nile train and he took notes to their performances. He watched the way they stood and the way they moved. He took notice of how they fought during sparring matches. He even listened to the sounds their punches and kicks did against the sandbags.

Once he did his research, Hedj sat on his office and wrote notes.

“This one needs to do more squats to stabilize her roots,” Hedj put his pencil under the name of each Combagal to list the improvements that they needed to make. “This one needs to strengthen her core to improve her mobility and stamina. This one needs to find another martial art, one that either acts as a complement or supplement.”

*I finished my list of improvements,* Hedj thought as he stared at the list. *Now I need to find the best way to tell them. It has to be encouraging rather than critical and judgmental.*

Luckily for him, being a host meant learning to know what to say to a woman to make them feel loved and welcomed. Hedj wrote some lines beneath each Combagal to figure out what to tell them. He then started practice what to say to each them in a way that was charming and encouraging.

“Am I interrupting something,” Eskel entered the room, surprising Hedj.

“Finished studying the Combagals, Mr. Eskel,” Hedj gave him a sheet of paper with the observations. “I am also working on some lines to bolster spirits and encourage them to do better.”

“Impressive,” Eskel smiled as he read the good points on the sheet of paper. “For someone who barely knew anything about furry fighting, you took this job like a fish takes to water.”

“This is no different than my job as a host,” Hedj explained.

“Is that so?” Eskel raised an eyebrow.

“Yes,” Hedj nodded. “I talk with girls and tell them what they want and need to hear. The only difference is that I have to see them train and fight compared to sitting in a table with them. That and I don’t get any tips from them.”

The joke made Eskel laugh. It was clear that Hedj not only had charisma with girls. He had the ability to make everyone relax and cheer up with his words.

CREAK!

 Nubia entered the office and stunned the two of them.

“Good morning, gentlemen,” Nubia greeted them happily.

“Good morning, Nubia,” Eskel and Hedj greeted them back.

“As much as I would like to talk to you two this morning, we have work to do,” Nubia pointed behind her to show two men behind her. “I have to talk with these men in my office. In the meantime, how is the Nedno’s Nightlife interview coming along, Eskel?”

“It’s going great,” Eskel smiled at her. “Already talked with Nendo about it.”

Nendo was a Labrador TV host who specialized in not only showing off nightsports, but also did double whammies by interviewing celebrities in the Flavor of the Week. He had a larger than life celebrity that kept Eskel entertained during his dinner with him two days ago.

“What did he say?” Nubia asked, wondering if she had to prepare herself for an interview.

“I got a call from his agent last night,” Eskel explained. “However, he wants the interview to take place at Club Nighthawk since that’s his Flavor of the Week.”

“And I take it that my interview with him will be the second whammy,” Nubia guessed, being already familiar with Club Nighthawk that she didn’t mind being interviewed.

“Well, this is the part that Nendo called Triple Whammy Segment,” Eskel did quotation marks as he mentioned Nendo’s idea. “Since Nyarai is the Masato Champion working at Club Nighthawk, she’ll be joining in the interview with you.”

“That Nendo knows how to make his audience laugh,” Nubia chuckled. “Anyway, speaking of Nyarai, it’s been a while since I saw her. Haven’t talked to her since that signing event earlier this month.”

“Not finished yet,” Eskel lifted a finger. “There’s more specifics to be given.”

“Do continue,” Nubia stated. “And be quick about it, these gentlemen want me to sponsor some products about perfume.”

“Well, he wants you and Nyarai to wear your Combagal costumes to excite and entice the audience as you both share a meal with Nendo,” Eskel continued. “And it’s not just him who will be dining with you, but the Ring Entourage of both champions.”

“Ring entourage?” Hedj asked. “What’s that?”

“It’s like a plus-one,” Eskel explained. “But Nubia can bring those who stand by her in the ring and any other person that she feels will contribute to her development. Knowing Nyarai, she may bring the Cyclone Crushers to increase her Pop.”

“A plus-one,” Nubia hummed as she stared at Hedj, who focused on Eskel’s explanation and then stared at the paperwork that he was going to finish. A thought crossed her mind.

*I should bring Hedj to the interview,* Nubia thought with a smile.

Granted, she didn’t need his presence. She was satisfied with just having Eskel at her corner, but she wanted to be around with Hedj. Maybe if people saw them together, there’d be a chance that more black jackals in Concatta would see them. Not only that, but Nubia wanted to have an opportunity to spend more time with him besides work.

Her personal feelings and professional feelings mixed together. She had to do this.

“Excuse me, Hedj,” Nubia addressed him.

“Yes, Nubia,” Hedj stared at his female counterpart.

“Would you like to join me and Eskel in this evening?” Nubia proposed.

“You want me to come with you to the interview?” Hedj asked, surprised by Nubia’s sudden invitation.

“I did,” Nubia pointed out. “Knowing Nyarai, she’ll bring the whole team, so what difference would it make if I invite you. Consider it payment for what happened last time.”

Hedj remembered how he saved Nubia from a kidnapping attempt during one of their first encounters. It was a surreal experience for Hedj, but he wasn’t going to let Nubia get hurt. His honor as a host demanded that he protect a damsel in distress.

“What happened last time?” one of the men asked Nubia.

“Personal affairs, gentlemen,” Nubia raised a hand and pointed to a nearby worker. “You. Can you bring these two gentlemen to my office? I’ll be there with them in a few minutes, but I’d rather not make them wait.”

“Sure,” the random worker nodded and led the men towards Nubia’s office.

With the men out of her hair, Nubia was able to concentrate on Hedj’s response.

“I’m really flattered,” Hedj blushed at being asked out. “Club Nighthawk is the best hostess club in all of Tendochi. I always wanted to go there.”

“It’s a good place to spend the night if you can afford it,” Nubia smiled at the male. “And it’s even better when it’s reserved. You get to enjoy the ambiance and the company you bring or buy along.”

“I’d like to go to Club Nighthawk with you,” Hedj smiled sincerely. “But I gotta ask, why do you want me to come? I thought working here was going to be my reward for saving you.”

“It was,” Nubia nodded. “But you’ve shown me that you’re overqualified for the job that I’ve given you. That’s why you’re getting a promotion.”

“A promotion?” Hedj and Eskel asked at the same time.

“Yes,” Nubia slammed her hands on the table, making Hedj and Eskel flinch. “I want you to take a more active role in my side of the business. I want you to be part of my ringside crew.”

“This is a bit too much,” Hedj grabbed a bottle of water and started drinking it. “What would I even do at the ringside?”

“I want you to participate in my entrances each match,” Nubia teased.

PFFFT!

Hedj spat out his drink. He made sure to lower his head to avoid spitting it on Nubia’s face. He even made sure to point his snout so that he’d get his shoes wet rather than Nubia’s feet.

“Quite an unbecoming act for a former host, Hedj,” Nubia teased. “Is there something on your mind?”

*What’s going on with Nubia?* Hedj thought to himself as he grabbed a napkin and dried off his lips and snout. *This isn’t like her. She’s being very…eager to have me close to her. First the interview and now this? What’s she planning on doing with me?*

“Sorry about that,” Hedj spoke after he recomposed himself. “I just didn’t want you to be so direct with me.”

“I’m always straight to the point,” Nubia gave Hedj a sheet of paper and instructed him to kneel down to clean up the water on the floor.

“But not that much, Nubia,” Eskel chimed in, being just as surprised as Hedj was with the invitation. “You’re always more deliberate. This is more of a spur of the moment thing.”

*What is going on with Nubia?*  Eskel thought, not realizing that Hedj already made that same question inside his head. *She’s been acting differently since Hedj started working here. She’s all smiles now. And why does she want a rookie to be on the ringside with her. She fired all of her entrance helpers after her third match!*

“But why do you want me to be at your ringside?” Hedj asked the question that Eskel wanted to ask at the moment.

“I am the Sonachi Champion now,” Nubia opened a pocket mirror and started checking her reflection. “I need to have proper introductions. Besides, Hedj will be perfect for my gimmick. I even have an idea of what costume he should wear.”

“Wait a second, Ms. Nubia,” Hedj started fidgeting. “This is all moving too fast. And I don’t think I’m the right fit for this. I’m still too inexperienced for this kind of thing. I just barely learned about furry fighting. It won’t be enough for me to be on your ringside.”

“Just follow Eskel’s steps and you’ll be fine,” Nubia waved a hand at the former host. “Don’t focus on the costume, just act natural and follow the routine.”

“Are you sure I’ll do fine?” Hedj asked nervously.

“Half of furry fighting is about charisma,” Nubia explained as she stared at the spot and was satisfied to see it spotless. “And you have plenty of charisma in spades.”

“I was a host before I joined here,” Hedj reminded her.

“See,” Nubia put a hand on his shoulder. “That’s the kind of answer that you can give. Now, are you ready for this? I won’t hold it against you if you refuse.”

Hedj stared at the Combagal. He wanted to say no, but he couldn’t say it. Maybe it was his honor as a host. Maybe it was his duty as a worker. Or maybe it was something related to his feelings as man. He didn’t know what caused it, but staring at Nubia’s eyes made him want to do what she wanted him to do.

“I’ll go to the interview with you,” Hedj sighed.

“Marvelous,” Nubia perked up as she showed him her phone. “I already picked up the costume that you and Hedj are going to wear. They used to belong to my presentation squad before I fired them for incompetency.”

“I can’t believe I’ll wear those robes again?” Eskel complained.

“What robes?” Hedj asked.

“These robes,” Nubia showed him a picture of one of her early matches.

The black jackal had a group of males dressed in a white robe that had golden highlights and was tied together with a white sash. On their hands were golden manacles. And they wore sandals on their feet, which contrasted with her barefoot appearance.

“I think I’m going to need a bit of face paint,” Hedj chuckled nervously as he saw the golden face paint that they had around their eyes.

“That won’t be necessary,” Nubia shook her head. “You’re perfect the way you look.”

“So I don’t need…” Eskel pointed at himself.

“No,” Nubia glared at him. “You put on the face paint.”

With the final decision made, Nubia went to her room to talk with the men who followed her around. Seeing that they had nothing else to do, Hedj and Eskel continued with their duties, preparing themselves for what was going to happen at the interview.

*I can’t believe I’m getting out of the apartment dressed like this,* Hedj thought miserably as he stared at his reflection.

Nubia let him go early at Golden Nile so that he could prepare himself for the evening. She made sure that the robes were the right size for him to wear. It was odd for him to wear manacles on his wrists or wear sandals on his feet, being someone who preferred closed-toed footwear like shoes for formal events or sneakers for casual outings.

Hedj walked out of his apartment room and walked out of his building. Even with his black fur, a blush was still present on his face from the embarrassment that he was feeling.

Any feelings of shame were erased when a golden limousine was parked outside. It was the Golden Nile limousine. Seeing such a classy vehicle coming to lift him made Hedj forget about any feelings of embarrassment that he felt.

The door opened to reveal Eskel, who looked miserable as he wore the same outfit that Hedj was wearing. He approached the jackal and gestured him.

“Nubia’s waiting for us,” Eskel instructed him. “Enter the limousine with us and we’ll tell you how it will go.”

“Yes, Mr. Eskel,” Hedj nodded and entered the limousine.

Upon entering the vehicle, he was surprised to see Nubia already dressed in her Combagal costume. The mixture of clothing and bandages was done deliberately to give Nubia a regal appearance while still showing her feminine beauty. The sight of it made Hedj blush.

“Do I look beautiful, Hedj?” Nubia asked, sounding a bit hopeful.

“You look like a goddess,” Hedj complimented her.

“I know I am,” Nubia sounded proud, but there was a hint of pink on her cheeks that didn’t go unnoticed by Eskel.

*And now it’s so obvious to me,* Eskel thought as he instructed the driver to take them to Club Nighthawk.

The cat made sure to sit between Nubia and Hedj to prevent any awkwardness between the two. Hedj looked relieved, but the glare that Nubia threw at him made him know that he was on hot water for ruining a moment.

“We’ll reach to Club Nighthawk in a few minutes,” Eskel told Hedj. “Do you remember what I told you about them?”

“Treat the Cyclone Crushers as if they were my hosting clients,” Hedj started listing with his fingers. “Treat Shun with respect regardless of his sumiguza past. Stay out of leg length from Nyarai if I don’t want her footprints all over my face.”

“Yes,” Eskel nodded. “Only speak when someone else speaks to you. Keep your body language regal and dignified to make Nubia look divine. Believe me, that’s how most of the assistants who worked for her entrance were fired.

“One of them slouched when he should have stayed standing at attention,” Nubia crossed her arms indignantly. “The worth of a goddess depends on the worth of her servants. None of them fitted my standards so I fired them.”

“Nubia’s a bit of a perfectionist,” Eskel told Hedj. “On the bright side, I never had to wear those robes for a while. At least until now.”

“I heard that,” Nubia glared at Eskel.

“I’m sorry,” Eskel sighed. “But I look ridiculous in this outfit. I don’t have the slight histrionic personality that motivates Combagals to perform.”

“Well, get histrionic,” Nubia extended a leg and poked him on the chest with a toe hard enough to make him grunt. “We need to make a good impression.”

“Understood,” Eskel groaned as he grabbed Nubia’s foot gently and set it back down on the floor so that she could stop poking him.

For the next five minutes, Eskel told Hedj how to behave at Club Nighthawk. Though Shun was a sumiguza, he was beloved by the club. As such, Hedj was instructed to not be judgmental or show fear of him.

“I will be on my best behavior,” Hedj promised.

Even though he learned about Nubia and Eskel’s connections to the sumiguza, he never judged them for their ties with the organization. To judge Shun would be to judge Nubia and Eskel after what they did for him. So he chose to keep his mouth shut.

Once the limousine parked outside of Club Nighthawk, Hedj and Eskel were the first to leave the car, standing at both sides of the door so that Nubia could get out. The Combagal entered by elegantly stepping one leg out of the car, then pulling herself with her arms to reveal her entire figure to the cameramen.

The Goddess walked with grace. After five steps ahead of them , Hedj and Eskel were given permission to follow her. The trio entered the nightclub, where they were met by Shun Gonfano.

“It’s a pleasure to see you again, Nubia,” Shun smiled at the jackal. “Congratulations on becoming the Sonachi Champion.”

“Thank you, Shun,” Nubia smiled curtly at the sumiguza.

“You must be very proud, Eskel,” Shun stared at the cat.

“I am,” Eskel stated. “Very few managers get to manage champion Combagals. But I’m one of the lucky few who’s best friends with his champion.”

“You certainly came a long way since you started,” Shun complimented the duo. His eyes narrowed as he stared at Hedj. “And who might you be, sir?”

“My name is Hedj,” the male jackal presented himself. “I used to be a host before Nubia hired me to work at Golden Nile.”

“Interesting,” Shun stared at him. “But I feel that there’s more to this story. Anything you’d like to share?”

“That is a story that I would like to keep personal for the time being,” Nubia kept their first meeting a secret from Shun in a tone that still displayed respect for the sumiguza.

“Very well,” Shun Gonfano pointed at the tables, showing the Cyclone Crushers dressed in their evening wear for the evening. The only one missing was Freydar, who was currently training. “You will sit at the table at the front and center so that the rest of my team won’t steal your spotlight. Nyarai was very particular about the seat position.”

“She sure is,” Nubia curtly nodded at the cheetah, who was dressed in her black bikini from the Cookie Crumble Match. “And I appreciate that after she stole my motif at the Cookie Crumble Match.”

“I do apologize for that,” Shun chuckled. “But Freydar was the one who chose it. If I had to choose between angering her or you, I’d say you’re the lesser of two evils.”

“Fair enough,” Nubia advanced and sat down next to Nyarai.

“Good evening, Nubia,” Nyarai greeted her.

“Good evening, Nyarai,” Nubia returned the greeting.

The two of them were sitting in front of a Labrador who was all smiles.

“This is Nendo,” Nyarai pointed at the Labrador.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you in person, Mr. Nendo,” Nubia gave him a regal smile.

“Likewise, Nubia,” Nendo smiled at the two. “Can you show me your Ring Entourage?”

Sure,” Nubia gestured at the cat and jackal so that they stood next to her. “This is my manager Eskel. And this is my new worker, Hedj.”

All eyes were zeroed on Hedj, making the male jackal nervous. Everyone already knew who Eskel was since he was always at Nubia’s corner during her matches. However, this was Hedj’s first public appearance, so everyone ignored Eskel over him.

The black jackal was an attractive male. And not only that, he was the same species as Nubia. It made people wonder if there was a connection between him and Nubia that was more than professional.

“I am ready for my interview, Mr. Nendo,” Nubia addressed the Labrador, catching his attention.

“Oh sure,” Nendo nodded. “How did it feel to be the Sonachi Champion?”

“It felt great,” Nubia smiled. “At first, I wasn’t interested in Sonachi, believing that they were more focused on style than substance. However, they proved to be quite a challenge, so that made my crowning all the more worthwhile.”

“I see,” Nendo focused his eyes on Nyarai. “Ms. Nyarai, I’ve been noticed that you are taking at least one or two matches per week. Why are you doing that?”

“I can’t let Botaun think that I’m a fluke just because I screwed up at the Cookie Crumble Match by letting that amateur choke me,” Nyarai answered bluntly, with a hint of bitterness and self-critical anger.

“Defeat does make one want to better herself,” Nendo observed. “Now on to the same questions.

For the next half an hour, Nendo threw casual questions. He asked Nubia how far she could see and where did she learn martial arts. Likewise, he asked Nyarai what was the fastest thing that she ever did, how she dealt with Wild discrimination, and why she was always barefoot.

The two champion Combagals had fun answering the questions and even throwing some additional commentary. Nyarai loved to tease and Nubia was happy to counter on her own.

After thirty minutes of question, Nendo asked a question that Nubia hoped he’d never voice out loud in front of the cameras.

“Ms. Nubia, can you tell us who is this jackal?” Nendo asked. “Is he a long-lost relative or a boyfriend?”

The question made everyone focus their attention on Nubia and Hedj. The male jackal was a bit nervous, but Nubia kept her cool under the gazing eyes of the audience.

“Mr. Hedj is a new worker that I hired to manage the Combagals at Golden Nile,” Nubia answered professionally. “He and I have neither familial or romantic connection. He is just a worker who happens to be a male jackal.”

“That’s kind of the same excuse people use to claim they’re not dating someone they’re obviously dating,” Nyarai cackled. “Never thought you’d be the kind of woman to bring a boy toy to an interview, Nubia. I guess you do have a sassy side.”

“He’s not a boy toy!” Nubia shrieked before coughing into her hand to recompose her vocal tone. “I found him entirely by coincidence and he’s helped the agency at lot.”

*She’s definitely in love with him,* Eskel thought as he saw how flustered Nubia acted. It was the first time she acted like that and it caught him by surprise.

“And pray tell, how did he help you?” Nendo asked as he wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

“A while ago, I ended in a bad spot,” Nubia explained, making sure to omit her kidnapping and rescuing for the sake of protecting Hedj’s privacy and keep her reputation intact. “His skills as a host helped me end a past professional relationship in a very satisfactory manner.”

The words Hedj heard made him smile. It was clear that Nubia wasn’t going to give details, but he knew what he did to earn his place in Golden Nile. And he was happy that Nubia was still grateful for what he did to save her.

“What role will your savior have at the ringside?” Nendo asked, hoping that Nubia would break her guard.

“Hedj has shown a good attention to detail,” Nubia spoke out on defense of him. “He can tell weaknesses and how to counter them to become stronger, improving the development of the Combagals in my agency. He will give me strategies at the ringside and moral support. And he will act as a supplementary manager to the Combagals of my agency when Eskel is not available.”

“I see,” Nendo nodded with a satisfied smile. “I believe that will be all for tonight. My name is Nendo and I hope you enjoyed the Triple Whammy Interview. Have a good night, Botaun!”

And with that, the interview was over. Nendo thanked Nubia and Nyarai for their answers and then he departed with the rest of the filming crew. With nothing else to do for the rest of the night, Nubia decided to stay at Club Nighthawk so that Hedj could enjoy himself.

She later came to regret her decision as she saw how popular he was with the rest of the Cyclone Crushers.

“Want some champagne, handsome?” Bolouma asked as she served him glass of it while she was drinking some beer.

“No, thanks, ma’am,” Hedj rejected the blushing panda, not sure if she was drunk or flirty.

“How about some of my milk?” Jowdie proposed with a wink as she showed him her Moo Lan Milk, pressing the bottles near her breasts as she did so.

“I’m lactose intolerant,” Hedj said, though Nubia could see that it was a lie based on his body language.

The sight of it made her blood boil, but Nubia controlled her anger and ordered Hedj to keep an eye on him.

*I have to relax,* Nubia thought. *Hedj is not some horny male. He would never leave my side because some pretty lady throws herself at him. And I don’t think anyone would be that slutty to go after him.*

Little did Nubia knew that the interview was broadcasted at the moment. And a naked mare who was getting her back and legs massaged was staring at the interview.

She was a mountain of muscle and beauty as her servants tended to her like a queen. One of them was filing her hooves and massaging the flesh beneath it. The other was using both hands to massage her back, one muscle at a time.

The mare had brown fur and matching wavy hair and tail that were colored red, though the hair was styled after a mohawk. On the bed were chainmail and accessories that fitted her furry fighting motif. And on the paused screen was Hedj.

“Is there anything wrong, Lady Kosta?” one of the masseurs asked.

“I am feeling hungry,” Kosta licked her lips as her eyes zeroed in on Hedj. She found her latest prey. And it wasn’t the Sonachi Champion but the boy toy she brought along. The mare stood up from her bed and got dressed.

Kosta had a champion to dethrone. And a male to get on her bed. The Queen of Conqueror was on the move, and she was not going to let some fake goddess get in the way.

The following week was very stressful for Hedj. He learned the dangers of fame as he discovered that he developed an unusually high fanbase ever since his interview at Club Nighthawk. Though the jackal had his own fanbase as a host, it was a relatively small one built over years. In fact, it was hard to call it a fanbase since he developed a genuine fondness for his clients.

The opposite case happened after his connection to Nubia was revealed. He realized that there was a difference between his admirers and the furry fighting fans. It was like he couldn’t get out of his house with being accosted by someone who wanted to know more about Nubia.

His neighbors asked him how it felt to work under the Sonachi Champion, even asking if Nubia was his long-lost sister or if they were dating. The women at his apartment were more interested on him, asking him out on dates in a very direct and aggressive manner.

It came to the point where Hedj woke up an hour earlier to sneak out of his apartment and go to Golden Nile. But he realized that fans were persistent and adaptable. The stress of being followed piled up clearly got to him. And everyone noticed when he arrived today.

“Make it stop,” Hedj told Nubia as he came back with messy fur, bags under his eyes, and looking stressed out.

“What happened to you?” Nubia asked, shocked at her counterpart’s appearance.

“More fans,” Hedj answered.

“You got even more fans than yesterday?” Nubia was shocked, having heard mentions of his popularity across the week.

SLAM!

Nubia flinched back as Hedj slammed a heavy stack of letters into her desk.

“Fan mail?” Nubia raised an eyebrow. “That’s new.”

“Make it stop,” Hedj pleaded as he sat down, looking like he’d grown older by a couple of decades from the sheer stress of his situation.

“How did you get so many letters?” Eskel asked as he and Nubia sorted through the mail. “Did you tell anyone your address?”

“I didn’t!” Hedj cried out. “I don’t know how they found out where I lived. At first, I thought the letters were from my apartment, but there are way more letters than the people living there.”

“That’s concerning,” Eskel flinched as he dreaded to open the letters.

“I think I will have to change my address,” Hedj complained.

“You don’t have to worry about that,” Nubia placed a hand on his cheek. “This is just temporary, Hedj. Things will get better.”

“Can you read the letters and tell me what they say?” Hedj asked, hoping the letters were just people expressing admiration for him.

“Will do,” Nubia promised as he opened a letter and read it.

The expression on Nubia’s face turned sour. Even someone without the Goddess Eyes could infer what was written in the letter based on the face that she was making.

*Okay, love letters are very common,* Nubia thought jealously. *Nothing bad about that. I can just ignore them. Pretty sure that Hedj has already gotten them before this interview.*

Nubia folded the letter and opened another one, using a clawed finger to cut open the envelope and pulled off the paper. It was another love letter. She opened another one and it was yet another written love declaration. And so were the following five.

“They’re just love declarations,” Nubia forced a reassuring smile, thought the twitching on her face made it clear that she was unhappy about the attention that Hedj was getting. “They’re pretty much harmless.”

“Indeed,” Eskel put a comforting hand on Hedj’s shoulder. “Most fans like to send love letters to their idols. But most of them are harmless. They just want to show their support for you. Haven’t you gotten love letters before?”

“I did as a host and when I was a student at school,” Hedj admitted, missing the way Nubia’s eyes narrowed when he spoke about his love life. “I can get if they are infatuated with me, but I don’t like how most people know my address.”

“We can relate,” Eskel pointed out. “Nubia really got a lot of letters when she debuted, mainly because of her beauty. But we gave them the proper response.”

And by that, he meant that Nubia had him put the love letters in the shredder and then burn them to ashes. Suffice to say, Nubia’s letters were very creepy. And even those that seemed innocent were met with suspicion since she was still recovering from her encounter with her old boss.

“Can you do whatever you want with the letters?” Hedj asked. “I don’t think that I am ready for this…popularity.”

“We’ll treat them with the utmost care,” Nubia promised. “In the meantime, go to my room and take a shower. Eskel will give you a spare suit since yours is covered in sweat.”

“Come along, Hedj,” Eskel led the jackal into the elevator so that he could relax.

The jackal stared at the latest letter in her hand. She stared at it with disgust as she opened it, feeling annoyed at how many people wanted to get her hands on Hedj. Her eyes glowed with fury as she read the next letter.

It started like a love letter, but then it turned into a request. It asked Hedj to send very personal pictures of himself. Or to send one of his belongings like clothing or jewelry to the return sender.

RIP! SHRED! TEAR!

Nubia tore apart the letter. And she did the same with every letter of the pile. She threw the shelves into an empty trash can, even stepping on it to send the letters to the bottom. She put a lid on the trash can to prevent Hedj from finding the letters.

*What is it with the people of Botaun being so disgusting?* Nubia thought angrily as she shuddered at the letter that caused her to have an anger attack.

The jackal had to do some meditation and breathing exercises to calm down. It took about ten minutes for Eskel and Hedj to arrive. The jackal was dressed in a nice change of clothes while Eskel was patting him on the back.

“You look great,” Nubia smiled at Hedj upon seeing him clean and showered. His face was back to its original look. He still had eye bags, but they were smaller and less noticeable to the naked eye.

“I am great,” Eskel nodded. “What happened to the letters?”

“I stored them up,” Nubia lied. “I have some servants who are great at discerning what’s worth replying and what’s worth ignoring.”

“They won’t do anything that will get me in trouble, right?” Hedj asked nervously.

“No,” Nubia promised. “Though we may have to change your address to ensure you won’t get any unwelcome mail. Do you have a friend who will let you live with him while we sort this out?”

“I can visit some of my host friends,” Hedj stated. “I used to share houses with them back during my early days as a host. I am sure that they won’t mind.”

“Hedj,” Nubia addressed the male jackal with an apologetic glance. “I am so sorry for having put you through this. I thrusted you too fast into the spotlight when I should have eased you slowly.”

“I’m pretty sure this was going to happen anyway,” Hedj smiled sadly. “I work for the Sonachi Champion. I am sure that was going to get a lot of unwanted attention in the future.”

“Regardless of the inevitability, it doesn’t absolve me of guilt,” Nubia shook her head, unwilling to let Hedj forgive her so easily. “I got carried away. For that mistake, I apologize. If there’s anything I can do to compensate you, I will accept it.”

“I’ll forgive you if you get me a new place to live,” Hedj smiled at her. “I’d like a private property so that nobody will find me.”

“I can get you one in the outskirts of Botaun,” Eskel promised. The cat had access to private property during his days as a sumiguza. He kept it in case he and Nubia made enemies that they couldn’t beat through furry fighting. “Though you may have to wake up early to go to work.”

“I don’t mind,” Hedj stated. “I’m an early riser. Besides, it gives me more time to admire the fields outside of Botaun. It would be nice to admire the transition that separates the country from the city.”

“Very well,” Eskel patted Hedj on the back for his optimism. “We’ll have to send notice of your change of address. We can do it after lunch.”

“Thanks,” Hedj felt a lot better. “By the way, what am I going to do about the fans?”

“Don’t mind them,” Nubia advised him. “Most of the fans are relatively harmless. You just have to roll with the punches.”

“That’s easier said than done,” Hedj groused. “My fans as a host would come in every few months when they had the money to pay for my services. Now I got fangirls, and some men, waiting near my house. They’re asking me for autographs or to take them on date. Frankly, this is like my host job, but with none of the pleasure of meeting a people. Instead, I feel like a thing.”

A pang of guilt stabbed Nubia’s heart. She knew what he meant by that. During her days with the sumiguza, Nubia was nothing more than a pretty face. She was an object to be used, no different than a decoration to boast the status of her boss.

*I have to make things right for Hedj,* Nubia thought to herself. *I will not let him be demoted as just a lust object like I was.*

“Listen, Hedj,” Nubia spoke slowly, trying to find the right words to comfort him. “I don’t know how things will end, but I promise…”

PING!

Nubia’s ears twitched at the same time Hedj’s ears did. She turned around and glared at Eskel for ruining the moment.

“Sorry about that,” Eskel stated. “But I got a Spotter notification. And it’s a video about you?”

“Why would you watch garbage about the Spotter?” Nubia asked angrily. “And how do you know that the video is about me?”

“The Spotter is a good way to start searching for information,” Hedj stated. “Granted, it’s mainly about defamation, but it lets people know about the most popular or unpopular Combagals at the moment. It’s like Shun said, nothing helps you want to learn the truth than an extremist platform.”

“How do you know that Nubia is the one featured at the video?” Hedj asked, feeling curious that Eskel knew the answer without looking at the phone.

“I programmed an alarm to ring if there’s a video that features Nubia,” Eskel sighed as he turned on the screen and showed them a video about the interview.

It showed a screenshot of Nubia and Hedj with a heart surrounding them. Several people were aske what they thought was the relationship between Nubia and Hedj. Most thought they were lovers, others thought they were relatives, others thought that they were strangers and that Nubia hired him because he was a fellow jackal. And others thought that there was no relationship between the two and that Hedj just happened to be the same species as Nubia.

*Oh, why did I rush in by showing Hedj to the world like that?* Nubia thought as she massaged her temples. *It’s going to take me a while to do damage control.*

“That doesn’t look good,” Hedj flinched upon seeing how interested people were in his apparent relationship with Nubia.

“This is fixable,” Nubia stated. “We just need to wait for the right time.”

“Goddess Nubia!” a Combagal entered the office.

“We’re a little busy at the moment,” Nubia spoke out, trying to measure her tone of voice to avoid snapping at her for intruding.

“There’s a Combagal horse lady demanding you to come,” she stated.

“A Combagal mare?” Nubia asked.

“Do you think it’s Halla?” Eskel nodded.

“No,” Nubia frowned angrily as she dismissed the horse member of the Cyclone Crushers. “Halla knows that I only accept meetings through appointments. But I have an idea who’s our surprise guest.”

With a vain breath to calm herself down, Nubia stormed out of her office, ready to confront the horse lady who dared to enter her territory.

“What’s going on with Nubia?” Hedj whispered to Eskel as they descended the stairs.

“Nubia is someone who believes in being in control of her own life,” Eskel explained as they followed the Sonachi Champion. “She had to live as someone under the power of those above her, but she fought back and gained the power to live her life as she sees fit. As such, she believes that people should treat her with the same formality and respect that she treats others.”

“I guess that explains why someone’s gotta make an appointment to meet her,” Hedj stated as he walked by Eskel. “But who is this mystery guest? Sounds like Nubia knows her.”

“As the Sonachi Champion, every Combagal in that district is her enemy,” Eskel stated as they kept descending the stairs. “That being said, she holds a special disdain for Combagals who dishonor the spots through fixing matches or dishonorable behavior. If you don’t believe me, then you should meet the former Sonachi Champion who tried to get her to work under her rather than defend the title fair and square.”

“That sounds awful,” Hedj frowned in disgust at Nubia’s predecessor.

“And she made her look awful,” Eskel grinned, remembering the sense of achievement when Nubia became the new Sonachi Champion. “But that’s a story for another time. I think I have an idea of who’s at our doorstep.”

“Who?” Hedj asked, feeling curious about her identity.

Eskel didn’t get to answer his question. In front of them was a muscular mare with two attractive males by her arms. She was easily the tallest women that he’d met in his life as she stood at 6’5 and had the musculature to match. The mare was dressed in a helmet, a fur cape, metal chainmail, and a bone collar. At her hip was a club that made Hedj worry, feeling that she brought a weapon into the agency.

“Quite a nice crib you have, Champion,” the mare grinned as she admired the architecture. “I’ve never seen such an opulent building.”

“What brings you to my agency, Kosta,” Nubia narrowed her eyes with disdain at the mare even as she addressed her politely.

“Just wanted to scout enemy territory and see the sights,” Kosta grinned. Before focusing her eyes on Hedj. “Lots of beautiful sights indeed.”

The stare that Kosta threw at Hedj made him feel more uneasy than the increasing number of fans that he got over the week. While it was clear that they were all attracted to them, there was a hint of admiration that prevented him from getting closer to him.

 But Kosta was different. Her eyes were gleaming with desire and a willingness to act on it. For the first time in his life, Hedj wished that he wasn’t as good looking as he normally was.

“Now, Nubia, aren’t you going to present me?” Kosta stared at Nubia and then gestured at Hedj, clearly making her intent known to her.

“I don’t have to introduce Hedj to you,” Nubia got between him and her. “You only came to start a fight with me.”

“Hey, handsome!” Kosta raised her voice, making Hedj and Nubia flinch from her volume. “My name is Kosta. I am the Queen of Conquerors in Sonachi. Aren’t you going to introduce yourself to me? I did come a long way to be here.”

*I can’t show fear to her,* Hedj clenched his fists. *I got this job by rescuing Nubia. I won’t back down against a horse cosplaying as a barbarian.*

“My name is Hedj,” the male jackal used a tone that he addressed for people who acted disrespectfully on his host club. “I am a proud worker of Golden Nile.”

“Interesting,” Kosta was amused by his introduction. “Would you like to have some lunch with me and my consorts, handsome? We walked all the way from my agency to yours. I have a proposal that Nubia will like.”

“Fine,” Nubia stared at her. “We’ll go to the cafeteria to get you something to eat. Follow me and I’ll get my cooks to make you a good meal.”

Nubia walked forward. Hedj strived to follow her, but he felt a hand on his back.

“What are you doing?” Eskel pulled him back.

“I’m telling her who I am,” Hedj replied.

“Do you know who she is?” Eskel hissed as Kosta walked besides Nubia.

“Her name is Kosta and she’s known as the Queen of Conquerors,” Hedj responded with the information he was given. “Is there something that I should know about.”

“She’s also one of the most dangerous Heels in Sonachi,” Eskel informed him. “Most of the Combagals here fight with the purpose of dazzling the audience. Kosta is one of the few true Heels in the district who is willing to hurt her foes as much as she’s allowed inside the ring.”

“How bad can she be?” Hedj asked, feeling that he wasn’t going to like the answer.

“Kosta is known for her brutality and debauchery,” Eskel informed him as they saw Nubia and Kosta sit in the same table. “There’s nothing she won’t do to get what she wants. You see these hot guys who follow her?”

“Yes,” Hedj nodded.

“I’m not sure if it’s true or false, but I heard that she personally recruits them and beats them into servitude,” Eskel whispered into Hedj’s ears. “She calls them her consorts, but it’s clear that they’re no different from pets. Take a look at them.”

Hedj stared at the two consorts. Just like Kosta, they were dressed in fur coats. Unlike her, they went without shirts, showing their muscular chests. As Hedj narrowed his eyes to stare at them, he noticed several bruises that looked like handprints and hoofprints.

The sight chilled Hedj’s blood. He hoped that they were masochists because that would at least justify the damage. But the empty eyes that they had as they sat next to Kosta made it clear that they were beaten within compliance.

*I don’t know why, but I feel like I just got myself into a trap,* Hedj thought as he and Eskel sat down next to Nubia.

The waiters came in and served everyone plates of salad. Ironically enough, despite Kosta being a horse, she didn’t like the salad.

“What is this green crap?” Kosta was outraged as she glared at Nubia.

“It’s called a salad,” Nubia explained condescendingly. “Honestly, you’re a horse and you don’t know what this dish is. You’re quite a disgrace for all herbivores.”

“Only horses who didn’t evolve eat that grass stuff,” Kosta snorted. “I like to eat meat and wine to drink. Don’t you have some wine at least.”

“I do,” Nubia clarified. “But you’re not the kind of woman who’d appreciate it. You’ll just gobble it down without taking the time to inhale its scent or taste its flavor.”

“Wine is for drinking,” Kosta was annoyed with Nubia’s statement.

“Wine is a symbol of wealth and sophistication,” Nubia explained. “It’s more than just grapes that were harvested by farmers, stomped into juice, and then put in a barrel to ferment. It’s a drink that celebrates the work of those farmers as they turn a simple fruit into a delectable drink.”

*It’s a good thing that Keiko is not here,* Eskel thought as he imagined the panda reacting with outrage at the way Kosta spoke disparagingly about wine.

“I don’t have time for this,” Kosta gave her salad to one of her consorts, who ate it without any protest. “I take it you know why I came here.”

“If you want a championship match, I refuse,” Nubia shook her head. “The only way you’re getting my belt is by the right method. You have to rise through the ranks until you’re the number one challenger in Sonachi. Only when you accomplished that requirement will I accept your challenge.”

“Who says that I came here for the belt?” Kosta started laughing.

“You’re not?” Nubia and Eskel asked at the same time, the former with the distrust and the latter with disbelief.

“No,” Kosta laughed. “I can get your belt at a later match. I’d enjoy the opportunity of stomping you into a pulp a second time. But first, I gotta beat you to get the reward that I want.”

“And what would that reward be?” Nubia asked, feeling that the mare was going to ask for something that she didn’t want to give.

“Him,” Kosta pointed a finger at Hedj.

“Me?” Hedj pointed at himself, shocked by her demand.

“Yes,” Kosta stared at him. “You. It’s been getting boring with my consorts. I need some fresh meat to add to my Chamber of Consorts.”

“Chamber of Consorts?” Hedj asked. “You mean as if there are more than those two consorts who are following you.”

“Yes,” Kosta grinned. “I have consorts, each of a different species. Some of them beg me to hire them. Others I take in matches. All of them learned to love me.”

“If you have that many consorts, then why are you after me?” Hedj demanded, feeling that whatever lust Kosta had for him could be easily satisfied by the consorts at her disposal.

“I get tired of dominating and bedding my consorts after a certain time,” Kosta explained as she gestured with one hand cupped into a circle and then showed the index finger of the other hand. “I like to break them and serve me.” Kosta shoved her circle hand into the finger to simulate a very one-sided sex session. The sight of it made Hedj grimace with disgust while Nubia snarled. “The first time’s always the best. But I find the first fifty are even better.”

“Why me?” Hedj asked, wanting to understand her reasoning. “Why can’t you hire some guy who’s into that?”

“I am a conqueror,” Kosta ran a hand down her breasts. “I like my consort best when I am the one who take them and break their will. Besides, I never had black jackal before.”

SLAM!

Nubia slammed her hands on the table and glared at the mare.

“How dare you enter my agency and demand that of me?” Nubia snarled at Kosta, feeling more furious that she’d ever been in her entire life. Not even Evelyn earned her ire as much as the barbarian Combagal did.

“I dare because I want a new toy to break,” Kosta grinned. “Now are we doing this or not?”

“I will not entertain a Right of Contract match with you!” Nubia glared hatefully at her rude and shameless guest. “I’d rather lose the belt to even agree to such a notion.”

“What’s a Right of Contract match?” Hedj asked Eskel in a low tone of voice. Both Nubia and Kosta started arguing, so he took the chance to fill in the gaps of what was going on here.

“A very rare type of match,” Eskel explained. “Combagals fight each other to take a member of the loser’s staff. It’s mostly used in tag team matches were one Combagal of the defeated team is taken to add to the team and force the loser to either fight solo or find a new partner for the rest of her career.”

“But what do I have to do with this?” Hedj asked. “I am no Combagal and Nubia is a solo Combagal exclusively.”

“Here comes the messed up part,” Eskel explained. “There are times where the winners take a member of the loser’s team. They can take a trainer, a tailor, cheerleaders and more. Let’s just say that it’s not very popular to do so because you’re essentially gambling your own team and treating the members as exchangeable possessions.”

“It is messed up!” Hedj was now angry.

“What’s the matter, Nubia?” Kosta taunted. “Are you afraid I’ll take your not-so-secret boyfriend away from you.”

“Hedj is not some prize to be own or a piece of meat to be used,” Nubia stared at the male counterpart, earning his attention and gratitude. “He’s my friend and a fellow member of Golden Nile who’s served me faithfully since he joined in.”

“Thank you, Nubia,” Hedj gave her a grateful smile that made Nubia’s heart melt even as she held a steely gaze focused on Kosta.

“You think that will stop me,” Kosta snorted as she also slammed her hands on the table and shoved her face next to Nubia’s. “If you don’t do as I say, you can spend a whole month of mudslinging at your door. I wonder how much your cred in Sonachi will be affected if they knew that the belt is being used by a coward who ran away from a fight.”

“I fear no woman,” Nubia growled.

“Then why are you backing away?” Kosta taunted.

“ENOUGH!” Hedj shouted, getting their attention.

“Hey, cutie, the women are talking,” Kosta stared at him with anger, the first time that she showed an expression other than desire.

“Well, since I am the prize of your match, I have the right to speak!” Hedj glared back at the mare before focusing his gaze on Nubia. “Accept the match, Nubia?”

“What?” Nubia and Eskel exclaimed, shocked by his request.

“Believe me, I don’t like doing this,” Hedj admitted. “The thought of being her consort makes me nervous and disgusted. But I won’t let your career be ruined because I didn’t take a dive for the team.”

Nubia stared at Hedj to look for some hesitation. With her Goddess Eyes, she saw that he was serious. He was going to risk himself for her career.

“Are you sure about this, Hedj?” Nubia asked gently.

“I am sure,” Hedj nodded.

“You have your match, Kosta,” Nubia turned around, hardening her facial features when she saw her foe. “Name the time of the match and then get out of my agency.”

“Three weeks,” Kosta clapped her hands. “In three weeks, I’ll take your boy from you. And if you want him back, you’ll have to bet your belt on a rematch.”

“There won’t be a rematch,” Nubia promised her. “I’ll make sure you won’t come back for me when I’m done with you.”

“Quit talking smack, girl,” Kosta stood up from her table, followed by her consorts. “Let’s get out of here, boys. Let’s go eat some real meat.”

The mare left the trio alone. Nubia stared at Eskel.

“Get the tapes ready, Eskel,” Nubia instructed him. “We’re gonna find her weakness and prepare for the match.”

“I’ll get the tapes right away,” Eskel promised. “Can you win the match, Nubia?”

“I’m not just gonna win,” Nubia promised as she stared at Hedj, knowing what was going to happen if she lost. “I’m going to destroy her.”

Three weeks passed since the challenge was issued. Nubia trained with a greater purpose than ever. She wasn’t just fighting to rise through the ranks. She wasn’t fighting to improve herself. She wasn’t fighting to gain a belt or defend the one that she had. She was fighting for Hedj. The male was risking his life to defend her honor by using himself as a prize. Nubia was not going to let Kosta take him to use as a toy.

But she knew that sheer training was not enough. She saw the videos of Kosta’s match. The mare was someone who fought with brutality. Her punches and kicks could easily break limbs. She was not above stomping people while they were agonizing on the canvas. And that was not counting the restriction holds.

That being said, she was far from perfect. There were two Combagals that defeated her. One of them was Evelyn in a title defense. As much as Nubia disliked Evelyn for trying to bribe her into not fighting her for the Sonachi Championship, she still praised her former adversary, if only because she hated Kosta more than her.

There was also another defeat that Kosta had earlier in her career. It happened about three or four years ago. She knew the Combagal who bested her and asked her to be her sparring partner during the whole three weeks.

Every day was an intense training session for Nubia, but she found improvements on how to fight against Kosta through her partner.

Once the day of the match arrived, Nubia was in her dressing room practicing some martial arts forms. She arrived early and spent an hour warming up for the event.

“You’re really motivated for this match,” Eskel observed. “I’ve never seen you train so much before a match. And those three weeks felt like I was talking to someone else.”

“This match is more important than a belt,” Nubia did a horse stand by doing a squad with both legs spread to the side. “I cannot allow myself to lose.”

“I can relate to that,” Eskel winced. “I find him to be a good man. And everyone at Golden Nile is going to be heartbroken if he’s taken from them.”

“I won’t let her take him away from us,” Nubia promised.

“Good,” Eskel smiled. “Tell that to him. He’s waiting outside of the changing room.”

“Let him come in,” Nubia instructed. “And make sure that our special guest arrives at her table.”

“Will do,” Eskel grinned, loving the stunt that Nubia was going to pull at the start of the match was going to be a display of dominance and mockery.

Eskel left the door and out came Hedj, wearing the same outfit that Nubia had him wear at the interview. The sight of it made Nubia blush a bit.

“You look great,” Nubia complimented him.

“Thanks,” Hedj smiled sadly. “I’m part of your entourage. I have to look good for you.”

“Are you ready for this?” Nubia asked him, reading his body language with her Goddess Eyes to see if there were signs of hesitancy.

“I am scared,” Hedj admitted. “But I know that you can win this.”

“And I will win this,” Nubia promised.

The two jackals stared at each other for a few seconds.

KNOCK! KNOCK! KNOCK!

“Am I interrupting something?” Eskel asked as he opened the door.

“Nothing at all,” Hedj sighed as he walked next to the cat. “Are you ready to make your entrance, Goddess Nubia.”

“Yes, I am,” Nubia declared as they walked out towards the entrance.

Their walk was interrupted when they saw some security guards.

“Ms. Nubia,” one of them spoke. “We need you to give Mr. Hedj to us.”

“What?” Nubia asked.

“It’s part of the match,” the other one pointed out. “Since his membership will be at hand, he will have to be part of the show.”

“You will not take him,” Nubia growled at them. “Now move aside or I’ll use you as a warmup exercise. Do you get that?”

“It’s okay, Nubia,” Hedj sighed. “It’s only one time.”

The male jackal stared at the security guards. They gave him reassuring looks and gestured him to follow them. Nubia and Eskel watched sadly as he left.

“Are you okay, Nubia?” Eskel asked, hoping that this wasn’t going to break her morale.

“No,” Nubia shook her head with an angry glare. “I am mad.”

The jackal Combagal went through the door and was greeted by the audience.

“And here we have the Sonachi Champion making her entrance! Look at that! She’s an angry Goddess ready to rain down punishment on the foe who dares to take something from her.”

Nubia walked to the ring. She normally would have kept a stoic face or even throw an occasional wave, but she was too mad to care. She stormed into the ring and waited for her foe to arrive.

“And on the next corner we have the Queen of Conquerors. She doesn’t care about the Sonachi Championship. But she’s after a prize she hopes to enjoy after dealing with her prey.”

The crowd jeered at her. Kosta relished on the Heat that she was getting. She was walking around, swinging her club at everyone, scaring them away with the speed and strength of her swings.

After intimidating everyone, she stood at her own corner, throwing Nubia a cocky smirk.

“Tonight we are having a special match. They are not fighting for the sake of the belt. But they are fighting for their own team. Now let’s give an introduction to Hedj.”

“Hedj!” Nubia exclaimed.

“Yeah,” Kosta grinned. ‘I wanted everyone to see the hunk I am getting on my harem after I am through with you.”

A cage was lowered from the rooftop, revealing a captive Hedj inside. The jackal was clinging the bars with hands and feet as he was scared of heights.

“Hedj!” Nubia exclaimed.

“Yes,” Hedj nodded his head, trying to sound brave. “It’s official, Nubia. Furry fighting is more intense and insane than I thought.”

“I am so sorry, Hedj!” Nubia apologized. “I should have never brought you into that interview.”

“It’s okay,” Hedj comforted her. “Despite everything, I did like seeing you train. It was oddly stimulating. And it’s making me excited to see you fight for my sake.”

The guilt disappeared and was replaced by determination. She glared at Kosta for what she put Hedj through and pointed a finger at her.

“I won’t be conquered,” Nubia told her.

“That’s a lot of bullshit,” Kosta told her. “All you do is claim that you are a Goddess, but you bleed and break like everyone else.”

“You should know about being broken,” Nubia smiled at Kosta for the first time since they met, taking the mare by surprise. She then pointed a finger at the referee. “Give me the microphone right now, referee! I have an announcement to make.”

“Yes, Nubia,” the referee gave her the microphone.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” Nubia addressed the crowd. “Thank you for showing up to this important match. It’s not a title defense, but it’s still a fight that’s happening to defend someone from my team. To celebrate this match, I brought along a special guest. From the Cyclone Crushers, I bring you Halla Roana!”

Kosta’s eyes widened when she saw an orange mare with long red hair and green eyes walk towards the announcers. She was wearing a crown with wings, a bra that covered her lower breasts and a ring that had fur suspenders, and two bands on her wrists and ankles. She was as tall and muscular as Kosta, but her body was more suited for running than brute strength.

Upon seeing Halla Roana, Kosta’s nostrils flared up. The orange mare raised her hands and celebrated the attention. She sat down next to the commentators and took a microphone.

“Good evening, people,” Halla Roana smiled at them. “My name is Halla Roana from the Cyclone Crushers. I am friend of Nubia and an old foe of Kosta. To commemorate this fight, Nubia asked me to be the main commentator of this fight.”

“You little bitch!” Kosta gritted her teeth.

“Being a district champion has its benefits,” Nubia taunted with a cheeky smile. “I learned that you lost two matches in your career. One of them was against Evelyn and the other against Halla. I don’t care much about Evelyn, but I do get along with Hana, who agreed to train with me these last few weeks to simulate a fight with you.”

“You’re wasting your time,” Kosta stated. “That bitch cannot imitate who I am.”

“You misunderstand,” Nubia relished on Kosta’s anger. “I didn’t ask her to fight like you. I asked her to fight better than you. I am confident that I can win this fight.”

“Ring the fucking bell!” Kosta ordered the referee.

“DING! DING! DING!”

“RAH!” Kosta shouted as she charged at Nubia with punches and kicks.

WOOSH! WOOSH! WOOSH!

Nubia started to dodge and deflect the strikes. As she watched Kosta’s matches, she realized how predictable the mare’s strikes were.

WHAM!

She deflected a straight punch, pivoted a bit, and then slammed her elbow into Kosta’s stomach, making her step back.

“Kosta shows how her technique is better than brute strength by deflecting Kosta’s punch and then giving her a spinning elbow to the stomach.”

As Kosta bent down from the elbow, Nubia turned her back on her. She grabbed her by the neck and jumped, bringing Kosta’s jaw to slam onto her shoulder.

“Nubia doesn’t just stop with an elbow to the stomach. The moment Kosta bends down, Nubia followed with a Stone Cold Stunner.”

WRAP!

“You little bitch!” Kosta yelled as she grabbed Nubia by the back of the neck and threw her into the canvas. It was a hip throw, but Kosta made sure to lift Nubia’s entire body and choked her with in the middle of a hip toss to increase the damage.

WHAM!

Nubia softened the fall by relaxing her body. Though she knew how to take a bump, it didn’t made the experience any less painful.

BOOM!

Kosta lifted a leg and tried to stomp Nubia with a stomp. The jackal rolled out of the way, but she still felt the vibrations through the canvas.

*I can’t let her hit me even once!*

“From the looks of it, Nubia is aiming for vital spots. However, Kosta’s brute strength and tough body means that she can endure Nubia’s attacks and counterattack at the right moment. She grabbed Nubia by the throat and slams her on the mat. It’s the first time in years that I see the Jotum Slam being used agains t a foe. But Nubia rolls away before she gets stomped by Kosta’s hoof.”

Nubia closed her eyes and opened them to unveil her True Goddess Sight. She was able to see Kosta’s movements before she made them. Not just because of her visual prowess or her foresight. It was because Kosta was so straight forward that she could predict her movements.

WOOSH! SMACK!

Nubia slid between Kosta’s legs and kicked her in the back of the knee. The horse grunted but she remained standing. With a snort, Kosta charged at Nubia with front punches and high kicks, but Nubia started doing them with acrobatics. She rolled, cartwheeled, and flipped arounds Kosta’s attacks, showing how untouchable she was.

*Halla told me that Kosta never fights wisely,* Nubia thought as she used her aerial prowess to dodge Kosta’s attacks. *I’ll be on the evasive and use that to make her waste her energy trying to catch me.*

“That does it!” Kosta shouted. “War Club now!”

“Yes,” one of the consorts threw her the club that she wore when she went to meet Nubia at the Golden Nile.

WHAP!

After catching the War Club, Kosta swung it at the referee before he had any chance of calling foul for her decision.

“And Kosta is up to her old tricks. In this case, she’s using her War Club as a foreign object. She’s been using this strategy ever since she lost against me during my Fortune Gal days.”

“I heard that Halla!” Kosta swung her War Club down, causing seismic vibrations that caught Nubia by surprise. “After I’m through with her, you’re next!”

WHAM! WHAM! WHAM!

Kosta tried to slam her War Club into Nubia’s head, but her War Club struck the canvas. Even though she missed, the vibrations on the ring ruined Nubia’s footing. She tripped a bit, and that was when Kosta made her move.

CRACK!

She swung her War Club to the side, striking Nubia at the side of the torso. The impact was such that the wind was knocked out of her. Not only that, but the felt and heard her ribs breaking. The Sonachi Champion gasped as she put a hand on her ribs, trying to feel their current condition.

CRACK!

A large hoof struck Nubia on the face, making Nubia stumble as her vision got blurry.

“Kosta manages to strike Nubia on the ribs with her War Club. The pain is such that Nubia is winded. As she recovers, Kosta strikes her the Ragna Rock Hoof.”

“Hey, referee,” Kosta kicked the referee awake as she threw the War Club away to pretend that she fought fairly. “Go end the match now.”

“Let me check if she’s okay,” the referee moved past and checked on Nubia.

The jackal was on bad conditions. She couldn’t focus properly to use her Goddess Sight. Her head was bleeding from the Ragna Rock Hoof she took. And now she couldn’t’ think straight.

“Get up and fight!” Hedj’s voice grounded her back into reality.

“Hedj?” Nubia asked as she stood up, showing the referee that she was still in fighting condition by her ability to stand up.

“You can’t give up now, Nubia!” Hedj shouted at her. “You’re the strongest woman that I’ve ever met. You surpassed adversity and made something of yourself. You’re kind to your Combagals and workers. You’re passionate about your beliefs. And you’re not done yet. You can’t lose to a lecherous horse like Kosta. She has no class, but you do. Show them why you are the Goddess of the Golden Nile, Nubia! Show them why you’re the Sonachi Champion!”

“Shut the hell up!” Kosta yelled at Hedj, angry at him for cheering up her competition and daring to insult her. “I’ll have you licking the champion’s blood off my hooves after I’m done with her.”

“You don’t have what it takes to be a champion,” Nubia told Kosta, earning her attention.

“Says the one who’s bleeding all over the ring,” Kosta taunted.

Nubia didn’t pay heed. She just used her palm to wipe the blood off her face. “You’re nothing but a brute that relies on weapons to win. Even Halla gave me tougher fights during our sparring matches.”

“Are you saying that I’m weaker than her?” Kosta glared at Nubia, daring her to repeat the previous statement.

“You are not Halla’s Heel counterpart,” Nubia remarked. “You’re nothing more than a poor imitation of her. I saw how you fought her. The moment that you ran out of stamina, she spent the rest of the fight pummeling you.”

Kosta was starting to tremble with rage. It was just like Nubia predicted.

*“If I had to say, Kosta is used to go all out, so she doesn’t have good stamina,”* Halla told her during their first day of sparring. *“I was taught to develop my stamina during my days as a Raceagal. That was my biggest strength and what allowed me to defeat her.”*

“I am not going to waste my time dragging out this match,” Nubia promised her. “I will end this match in a single move.”

“Then I dare you to try it out!” Kosta charged at Nubia, trying to imitate Halla Roana’s trademark charge.

WOOSH! BOING! WOOSH!

“Kosta is using my Racing Ring Ropes technique to charge at Nubia. She’s using the recoil of the springs to increase her momentum. And Nubia is already on the defensive.”

The jackal was on the evasive. It was hard to see with blood on her eyes, but she still powered through as she wiped the red liquid from her eyes. Her plan to exhaust Kosta was still in motion.

WRAP!

Nubia thought that she’d dodged Kosta, but she was proven wrong when she felt a hand on her neck and another between her legs. The Sonachi Champion was lifted in the air and then her back was put on Kosta’s head, which pushed back against it.

“AAAAAHHHHHH!”

Kosta screamed in agony, much to the horror of her fans.

“Kosta is using The Dominator to break Nubia’s back. If she doesn’t escape, then she won’t be able to win the match.”

Nubia’s statement made her remember the training.

*“You have flawless technique,”* Halla told her. *“But I must warn you that technique won’t be enough against foes who surpass you in strength. You may run circles against Kosta, but if she uses a submission hold with all her strength, the match will be over before you can do anything.”*

“I…won’t…fall…down!” Nubia shouted as she relaxed her body to slip a leg from his grasp, which she then used to kick Kosta’s arm. With her legs free, Nubia used Kosta’s shoulder to backflip so that she could kick her in the ribs.

WHAM!

Both of Nubia’s feet hit Kosta in the ribs, making her stop the hold. As Kosta rubbed her ribs, Nubia was panting hard. She recalled Halla’s advice before the match.

“Nubia slips past The Dominator and escapes. But will that be enough to survive. The last line of the fight is about to be reached soon.”

*“If there was another weakness for Kosta is her stomach,”* Nubia remembered Halla explain in their last sparring match. *“I pummeled her black and blue after she ran out of energy. Eventually, I knocked her down and used my Thunder Trot to stopm her stomach with my hooves at full speed. I didn’t stop until she was coughing up blood. I am sure that the damage will always be here in her career.”*

It was still there. And it was worse than ever. Nubia saw Evelyn’s champion defense against Kosta. The fight ended when Evelyn stole the War Hammer from Kosta and used it to strike her in the stomach, causing severe internal bleeding that hospitalized the mare. Injuries like that didn’t just heal in a few months. They were there for years. And Nubia was going to exploit it.

CRACK! CRACK!

Nubia danced her way around Kosta, aiming kicks to the back of her knees and pressure points that left his arms sleepy. As Kosta tried to move forward, Nubia made her move.

CRACK!

She lifted a leg, chambered it, and then threw a side kick to the diaphragm, driving the sole of her foot into her stomach. The impact made Kosta bleed from the mouth, proving that she was still recovering from the damage that Evelyn gave her in their title match. She bent down, letting her blood fall on Nubia’s leg.

The black jackal wasn’t bothered by the blood. At this point, she weas too angry to care.

“Nile Breaker!” Nubia pulled her leg and jumped.

CRACK! CRACK!

The Sonachi Champion brought her elbows down on Kosta’s head, making the mare’s eyes turn white as she knelt down and fell unconscious.

DING! DING! DING!

“And the fight wins with Nubia unveiling a new move. A kick to the diaphragm followed by a double elbow slam on the head. Such a wonderful comeback from the brink of defeat. Nubia wins the match and gets to keep Hedj on her entourage.”

The crowd voiced their approval. The cage was lowered and then Hedj came out, looking delighted at the turn of events. All of the crowd cheered as he stepped out of the cage, glad that Nubia fought tooth and nail to keep him on the team.

“Give me the microphone,” Nubia demanded the referee, who wisely gave it to her after seeing Kosta being carried on a stretcher by her consorts.

“This jackal is Hedj,” Nubia pointed at him. “And this is the last time I’ll ever bet him on a match like I did three weeks ago. He is a treasured member of Golden Nile. And I’ll punishe everyone who goes after him in the future. Starting today, Hedj is off limits. Don’t let me catch you sending him fam mail or trying to enslave him against my will. He’s mine and mine alone!”

The declaration made Hedj blush, feeling very protected by the words that Nubia said.

“Let’s go to Golden Nile to celebrate,” Nubia told Hedj as she and him reunited with Eskel made their way home.

SLIP!

“AHH!” Nubia exclaimed as she tripped over her feet.

“Are you okay?” Hedj asked as he and Eskel kept her on her feet.

“Just a bit sore,” Nubia stated. “I’ll need you to get me to the library.”

“I’ll take you there,” Hedj grabbed her by the back and legs, holding her on his arms.

“Hedj!” Eskel exclaimed. “What are you doing?”

“I’m sorry for breaking your treasured taboo,” Hedj apologized to Nubia. “But you saved e tonight. It’s time for me to pay back my debt by letting you lean on me.”

“I’ll allow it,” Nubia said, fighting off the blush on her cheeks. “Thank you for caring, Hedj. I really appreciate your concern.”

“It’s my job to care,” Hedj joked. “I’m a member of Golden Nile and your ring entourage. And I see that I have to take care of my Goddess now.”

The joking comment made Nubia blush harder.

“But seriously, no more Contact Matches,” Hedj added a little sternly.

“No more of those,” Nubia reassured him.

“Good,” Hedj beamed. “Let’s go to the doctor.”

Though Nubia didn’t lose her belt, she felt like she gained something more important in her fight with Kosta. She proudly accepted her feeling as Hedj took her to get a doctor.