Chapter One: World Building

Well, she’d done it now. Nara wasn’t sure who to blame. Her mother. Out of spite. Cara. For abandoning her. Uthia. For introducing her to a life in the shadows. She frowned. No, she couldn’t blame the old Bosmer, not so soon after her death. If not for Uthia, she would have died long ago.

That only left herself. Of course. She never should have come to Cyrodiil. She should have stayed in Skyrim, where she would have been safe from Uthia’s contacts in the Thieves Guild. Where she wouldn’t have met the Gray Fox and found herself in this mess. When she left Helgen, she should have searched for her mother’s other children, not run to the only one too far away to care anymore.

But she had never been known for making the best choices, and so here she was, surrounded by soldiers of the Imperial Legion as they escorted her to her new life as an Arena combatant. It wasn’t the life she wanted, but it was better than life in prison. Or so she hoped. Maybe she shouldn’t count on that. This could just be another bad decision in the long, long string of bad decisions she’d made since her mother died.

A tiny part of her was pleased with her current circumstances. If only her mother could see her now. She had no doubt that the former priestess of Dibella would take this as a personal insult.

For a sickening moment she could hear her mother’s voice, wiping all hints of pleasure from her mind. *Why must you always disappoint me, Nara? Why do you have to be like this? Haven’t I taught you better? You’re only worth is in beauty. That is how you will make Dibella proud*.

Well, she doubted the goddess of beauty would be proud of her now. She was so covered in dirt, you couldn’t tell what color her skin was. If not for her height and golden hair, people may not know she was a Nord. Her clothes—hand me downs from Uthia—were little more than rags, as filthy as she was and torn in several places. She’d had some pieces of armor, but they took it all when they captured her. Including her bow and arrows. She felt naked without those.

That bow hadn’t left her hands since her Bosmer benefactor gave it to her. More than once, Nara had caught herself clenching her fists to combat the empty feeling. The guards eyed her whenever she did, as if she was preparing to strike out. No worries there. She knew she wouldn’t win that fight. Not without her bow.

The soldier to her right took hold of her arm, pulling her to a stop as the two in front of her pulled the gates to the Arena District open. It was about time. They’d paraded her through the entire Imperial City. She may have only been here once before, but she knew it wasn’t necessary to go through all inner districts to reach the arena from the prison. Whether it was for humiliation or enervation purposes, she didn’t know.

What little relief she felt at reaching their destination vanished within a few seconds. Her stomach performed a flip and drop as she stared up at the massive coliseum. She wasn’t entirely sure what to expect once inside, but she could tell just by looking that untold horrors awaited her. People died in there, going in and never coming out again. Unless she could keep her wits about her, she would be just another victim. If she pulled through, if she found a way to survive, she could one day walk away. This was the price for her freedom. She’d agreed to it because it was better than seeing the inside of a cell for the rest of her days.

There was a lot to be grateful for, if she were the thanksgiving type. Despite the trouble he’d caused her, the Gray Fox had devised this method for getting her out. Maybe he felt he owed her. She didn’t care. When the Captain offered her this one and only alternative to prison, she’d taken it. She didn’t care who she had to thank. The wounded bitterness that assaulted her when she learned that Cara had left the Imperial City without telling her came back. If not for that, she may have been freed already. Cara would have vouched for her. Or maybe she wouldn’t have. Nara was beginning to feel she no longer knew her sister, and that’s how Cara wanted it.