

Duel of the Fates

Forward Momentum

Mune Cinteroph (3607)



Judecca

Medical Facilities – Hospital Room

They were tired of staring at the sterile hospital room walls and ceiling. Days had turned to weeks and months. They had begun to blend before too long, most of their time spent in the merciful embrace of unconsciousness. Those long stretches of sweet unconsciousness, where the pain and boredom faded into oblivion, were behind them. Now, there were just the sterile, unfeeling medical facility walls. Well, the walls and a Togorian bodyguard that spent more time conversing and keeping them company than doing any actual bodyguarding.

The pain was not nearly what it was, nor detachment from their body. They felt firmly anchored once more in the here and now. Mune scratched idly at the IV in their right wrist and frowned at the tube. Their friend and doctor had told them it could be weeks, perhaps only another month or two, before they were back on their feet. Their mind dwelled still on the events that had rendered them with more psychological scars than they could count. *More to add to the collection*, Mune thought bitterly. Only the Togorian seemed to be able to draw them back from such thoughts, from the memory of putting their sabre through the chest of their beloved. They reminded themselves that it was a mercy to end the pain that was killing him, but that was little consolation. As much as he begged for Mune to do it, the wounds were inevitable upon the Shistavanen's psyche.

"Mune?" came the deep, growling voice of their bodyguard.

Bodyguard? *No*, Mune thoughts, *friend*.

"Mm?" Mune turned their head towards the Togorian's usual seat.

"A nurse will be around shortly to remove the IV," the feline spoke again before the Shistavanen could get too excited, "You will begin physiotherapy tomorrow. After you've regained enough mobility and muscle strength...."

"When will that be?" Mune interrupted.

"That will depend on you, I suppose."

"I am ready to leave now, Caleb."

"There is no need to rush... give it time," the Togorian soothed.

Mune looked away, looked to the cold, unfeeling walls. They nodded and felt the soft touch of the feline's hand resting on theirs. Turning their gaze back to the large Togorian, they offered a sheepish smile. "I have grown weary of this place."

"I understand completely... Just wait a little longer and do your best to follow the doctor's guidance. She has your well-being foremost in mind," Caleb assured.

"Logically, I know that," Mune sighed and closed their eyes. Already they felt sleep creeping back up. "Wake me when the nurse gets here?"

"Of course."

The IV was removed, and physiotherapy began the next day. It went on for weeks, then months. All the while, Mune patiently endured it. When they regained enough stamina, they started taking walks to the facility's gardens, Caleb in close company. There they enjoyed hours of conversation, breaking up the monotony of every day. Mune started working on simple martial arts movements when it was deemed okay. Frustrated at first at how slowly their body reacted, they pushed themselves day in and day out to get back to where they were.

Their eighteenth birthday came and went. Their patience was exhausted. In frustration, they returned to their room and, growling, turned on the Togorian in frustration, "Is it not time to return to the clan?"

Caleb sighed and leaned against the door frame, "You keep trying to rush...."

"Rush?! I have been here for what? A year?" Mune bristled, "That is plenty long enough."

"Did you forget the part about your heart stopping more than once?"

Mune frowned, ears down, tail still. "Of course not."

"Or the fact that the virus your father's company infected you with was intended to kill you?"

"I am well aware!" Mune snarled.

As angry as they were, they could not hold onto the flame of that anger. Mune sat heavily upon their bed, eyes staring fixedly at the floor. Caleb padded across the room; a moment later, he knelt and grasped Mune's hand in his own. It drew the Shistavanen's ruby eyes to meet Caleb's icy blue.

"How about this. I will plead your case to the doctor when you can win a sparring match with me."

Mune arched a brow, their ears coming up partway. Could they win a match right then? They still tired far too quickly just going through the practice exercises. Even physio wore them out. It was fair, though, the more Mune thought about it. If they were to return to the clan, they would need to be fit for service, which meant they could be called upon to fight in one battle or another. They

were not confident they could depend on their body if push came to shove as it stood. Mune swallowed heavily, then gave a slow nod.

“Deal.”

Judecca

Medical Facilities – Garden

A Month Later

“Are you sure you’re up for this?” Caleb asked, eyeing the Shistavanen while stretching. “You’re still looking...”

“They always look scrawny,” came a woman’s voice.

Mune glanced towards the doctor and frowned, “I prefer wiry... maybe lean?”

“I know what you prefer, but you, Mune, are scrawny.” The Togruta grinned. “So, if I understand correctly, this is a test to see whether you are ready to leave here? Do you not think that should be my decision as your doctor?”

Mune arched a brow but left the question unanswered. They shifted their glance back towards the tall Togorian. “Let us do this,” they said, getting into a loose stance.

Caleb nodded, lowering into a deep ready stance, feet far apart and arms up. The two began to circle, watching each other closely. Mune’s mind analyzed their opponent’s movements and studied how his body worked. The Shistavanen’s mind remained sharp; they only needed their body to get back on the same page. Finally, Caleb made a move. The large Togorian made to grab for the smaller canine. Mune hopped back, adjusting his footing and kicked up towards their opponent’s center of mass. Caleb caught the kick only to feel Mune twist and bring the other foot up, using the Togorian’s hold as leverage. He was forced to release Mune’s leg to duck back from the second attack.

Caleb did not give the Shistavanen time to regain their balance; he moved in for a strike. Mune dodged under the blow. They settled into testing their defences. Quick open-handed strikes, easy blocks and dodges, they circled each other taking measures and probing for cracks where an attack could slip through. Mune dodged strike after strike, returning blow for blow and gauging how Caleb dealt with each attempt to get through his guard.

He is a little slower than me, Mune thought, mind analyzing. No, he is slower than I was. Can I still move that quick?

Mune began to breathe heavier, fighting the urge to pant. Then came a sharp open-handed blow to their upper body. Mune caught it square in the chest, and the air was knocked from their lungs. They barely managed to twist sideways to dodge the follow-up. Then came a high kick, and Mune blocked it, catching it against their forearm. *Come on! You can fight better than this!*

Caleb hesitated, eyeing the Shistavanen with concern, "Are you okay to keep going?"

Mune moved quickly into the Togorian's guard. Caleb barely blocked the open palm strike aimed at his solar plexus. He turned the block into a grab and used Mune's momentum to turn that into a throw. He had not expected the Shistavanen to land on their feet and drop into a leg sweep. The world tilted violently, and Caleb hit the ground with a grunt. He rolled away and was on his knees when the next attack came. *The doctor said they were fast, but sith spit.* He blocked the Shista's kick with his forearm. He could feel the slight tremor in the limb and knew Mune was pushing themselves hard. They grasped the limb and threw the much lighter Shista.

Mune twisted midair and landed in a crouch, the Force humming through them. They breathed in slow, centring themselves then dashing back at their opponent. The attacks came in rapid succession. Caleb was in better shape, blocking and countering. Mune was fast, though and managed to evade the Togorian's counters. Mune only tapped into the Force when they needed a burst of agility to heighten their natural speed. They were tiring fast, their stamina still not where it used to be.

They are holding their own, Caleb thought to themselves, grinning a bit. *They are so determined.*

Mune's breathing came hard and fast, fur growing damp with sweat. They dodged another attack in an acrobatic roll. Behind Caleb, they quickly leapt to get a strike in at their opponent's back, but Caleb was already turning and deflected the blow and grabbed hold. The Togorian executed another circular throw, and Mune landed hard on their back. They lay panting in the grass a moment, staring up at the sky.

Coming to stand over them, Caleb gazed down into their ruby eyes. "Good fight, Mune."

"I did not even land a hit," Mune argued between pants of air.

"You held your own just fine against an opponent in full fighting form," Caleb countered, "I'll need to keep training if I expect to keep up with you at one-hundred percent."

"Rematch sometime?"

Caleb extended a hand. The Shistavanen was unsteady on their feet and stumbled against the Togorian. Caleb smiled, "Rematch when you are at full strength? I'm there."

Their observer cleared her throat, drawing attention before speaking, "I will inform the clan that you will be returning. Be prepared to be very busy, Mune."

"I am looking forward to it."

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