

Another

By

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It was intense, raging throughout the body like fire over coal. The heat and throbbing pain next, accompanied by the metallic taste of blood mixed with dirt. “I think I’m in love,” he said, wiping the blood from his mouth as he stood to his feet. The scene before him resembled an ancient gladiatorial arena. There were no onlookers, though. Just one man and one woman.

“I see you can at least take a punch,” the attacker said as she readied her stance once more. “What is your name?”

“Ein,” he said. “My name is Ein Anderson, and you’re the first woman who’s ever hit me, let alone that hard. And you are?”

“You are the first of your rabble to ask. Intrigue me, and I might tell you,” She remarked, preparing to strike again.

As she leapt at him once more with superhuman speed, Ein readied himself. He wasn’t some martial arts master or superhero in disguise. However, he was the embodiment of the term willful. When the female combatant threw a punch at the same spot, intending to end the fight this time, he dodged at the last second. As her fist grazed the side of his face, drawing more blood, he managed to uppercut her in the chin underneath her offensive arm.

She didn’t go down, but she did step back, reaching for her face. Her mouth was bleeding. She immediately let out a hearty laugh while regaining eye contact with Ein. “You are the first to make me bleed,” she said with a joyful smile. Faster than before, she dashed at him. This time, she delivered a roundhouse kick so fast he couldn’t see it coming until it was too late.

The last thing he could think of as he was fading unconscious was that he had never seen someone so beautiful in that moment.

As Ein lay there on the ground, he began to dream. The dream was of his own memories, new and old. He was a comic book writer who lived his entire life admiring the worlds of stories. They inspired him from a young age, and he tried to live his life with the intent of bringing that love into reality. What he did not consider was a different reality bringing him to it. The last thing he remembered was passing out at his desk while preparing a script for his next comic. He had a habit of writing at night because that was when his ideas flourished. This habit often led to sleeping in his day clothes and waking up with a crick in his neck the next morning. However, on this night, he was abruptly awoken to a bright light flashing in his room as a portal opened behind his desk. The sound of it was oppressively loud, followed by a stabilizing quiet. The other side looked like a scene straight out of a fantasy novel: another world. Without an ounce of fear and brimming with excitement, Ein stuck his head through the portal, hoping to get a better view.

“Ah, another!” a woman said, pulling him through with extraordinary strength.

Ein fell face down into what looked like a training ground. As he rose to his feet, regaining his composure, he was awestruck by an enormous castle that lingered behind the arena. “Yep, I’m definitely in another world,” he said, both shocked and excited at the same time. As he looked back toward the direction he was thrown from, he saw a light-skinned woman with an amazon-like build, black hair, and noble armor adorning her figure.

“You!” she shouted with authority. “Prepare to fight or leave now! I tire of curious cowards and delusional degenerates.”

“Wait? Did you just alliterate on purpose?” he chuckled. “For such an impressive woman, you’re quite cute.”

“A jester then,” she stated as she leapt at him. Delivering a punch that caused a fully grown man to cartwheel into the dirt beneath him.

This was the last thing Ein remembered before their fight continued. In the end, he managed to weather the first blow, but a roundhouse kick following a punch like that would knock out pretty much anyone.

After the equivalent of a few hours had passed back in the present time, he began to wake to the sound of what he thought was an angel calling his name.

“Anderson. Ein Anderson. Ein Anderson.”

As he began to regain consciousness, he could only think of the pounding he felt in his head that seemed to ease as he felt the hand of a woman he recognized. It was the same black-haired woman from before. One of her hands was emitting a dim light as she gently pressed it to his face. The longer she held it there, the more the pain seemed to dissipate. After a few moments, the pain he had felt before was completely gone.

“Was that magic?” he asked as he sat up, intrigued, but still a bit sore from their fight before.

“Yes, and the swelling should be completely gone after a few more hours of rest.

“Awesome!”

“Indeed,” she fired back with a smile.

They both stared at each other in silence for a few moments, unsure of what to say next.

“I don’t mean to sound ungrateful, but why would you heal me after starting a fight with me?” Ein asked. “Also, what did you mean before? You said ‘another’ before you pulled me through that portal.”

“You are not the first person to come through a portal like the one you saw. Others like yourself have found their way through similar portals. We have a policy to ward off any outsiders. We do this by offering a trial by combat. Some ran back to their worlds immediately in fear. Others were pompous. They claimed they would win the fight easily and have their way in our world. None of ‘them’ could take a single punch. If you are concerned, they were tended to by healers before they were sent back home. As for you, you did not win the fight. However, you did impress me in our battle, which is why I am healing you personally.”

“Wait, you just said I lost. Why didn’t you send me back home then?”

“I am a warrior. I have fought countless times throughout my life; trained to be the best against men and women alike, and yet, you are the first of any who has made me bleed in battle. I am intrigued by you, Ein Anderson. That is why you are still here.”

“Ein is fine, and the feeling is mutual. I’ve never met anyone quite like you.

“That is pleasing to hear. Well then, rest up. You have a long day tomorrow, Ein.” The mysterious woman proceeds to get up and leave the room.

“Wait, what? Tomorrow? What do you mean by tomorrow?” he shouted. “What is this place? How are you so strong? I have a job back in my world; what about that?” As she continued to exit the room, he said, “At least tell me your name; I ‘intrigued you,’ didn’t I!”

She finally stops in the doorway, looking back with a smile. “My name is Ana,” she says, closing the door behind her.

As he sat there, bewildered, and fatigue began to set in once more, there was only one thing Ein was sure of in that moment: “I am so getting fired.”