



First Look Access

(Episode 10: T. Damon)

The Falling

Chapter 1

"Narena! You are going to get us into trouble again!" Nyxen, a dark-haired, strong-browed nymph frantically called to his older sister, who was dashing ahead of him through the Forest. He struggled to keep up as his athletic sister sprinted towards the outskirts of Nymph Kingdom. "Seriously, Narena! You know I can't run as fast as you!" Nyxen wailed.

He followed his sister through a maze of twisted oak trees, darted around towering redwoods, and delicately hopped from pebble to pebble over the Forest's creek.

"Hey, who asked you to come with me?" Narena called back over her shoulder.

"What...choice...do...I...have?" Nyxen panted, catching up as she came to a stop at the bottom of an old oak tree. "I'm the one who has to report." He brushed a trail of sweat off his brow and scowled in his sister's direction.

"Honestly, Nyxen, I really don't care. Report what you want. Meanwhile, this is my life to enjoy and no one is going to stop me, certainly not you or your neurotic rules."

Narena scaled the tree, and Nyxen gasped every time she almost missed her footing, but could not tear his eyes away nor follow his sister to such extreme heights. When she finally reached a crooked branch high in the Forest's canopy, she stuck her tongue out at him, with the breathtaking

Lapis Mountain standing proudly atop a cluster of trees, far away in the distance behind her.

From a young age, Nyxen had a tendency to be overprotective of his sister, and tried his best to look out for her despite her mischievous ways. It almost seemed as though he were the elder sibling, and she the younger. But Nyxen lacked the carefree outlook Narena prided herself on, though she did admire his neurotic nature when it proved useful. And since it was no longer acceptable to gallivant through certain areas of the Forest, he had major right to be so careful on this day.

“Narena. I know what you're doing, and you know the king has forbidden it. No one is supposed to watch the warriors' morning drill. What if someone sees you?” Nyxen hissed upward, but found his sister simply ignored him in response.

“Will you calm down little brother?” she finally replied after some time, not bothering to tear her eyes away from scanning the tree line ahead of her. “I've almost gotten close enough to see them. You worry too much, the Forest won't betray me.”

“Narena...!” Nyxen hissed, this time sounding more irritated than he had before. “If you are not out of that tree by the time I count to three...”

“You'll what?” Narena hissed back, annoyed that he would even consider giving her such an ultimatum. “String me up by my toes?” She giggled. “Shh! Be quiet for a moment... I think I see something.”

Nyxen folded his arms and stared helplessly up the tree, but Narena's attention was now drawn to the three male nymphs crouched near the

sacred clearing not far from her perch. She recognized all of them- but they certainly weren't doing morning drill.

What are they doing?

She could not hear what General Felide was saying to his son, Kellen, but she could tell the younger nymph looked fairly irritated. And that Rowan, King Alston's warrior son, was ignoring them both, running his bony fingers through his thick, golden hair as he normally did.

“What's going on?!” Nyxen called upward.

“SHH!” Narena replied, hunching even lower. Nyxen sighed and sat himself at the base of the tree, leaning his back to the trunk before closing his eyes. But Narena of course did not notice what her brother was doing, as she was solely focused on whatever it was the three male nymphs seemed to be waiting for.

After several minutes, a small, mousey creature crept out from the brush toward the three warriors. Felide immediately moved toward it, spoke for a few minutes, then turned back to the other nymphs.

Whatever he was saying got cut short by a bloodcurdling shriek as a swarm of hymenopteral insects appeared out of nowhere, engulfed the creature's body, and then quickly buzzed toward the other nymphs. Narena slapped her hand across her mouth to keep from screaming at the sight of what they'd left behind: a blinding white skeleton.

“Run!” Narena heard Felide shriek. “Back to the palace!”

Chapter 2

Rap, rap, rap.

Narena filtered into consciousness, then turned over and drifted away.

Rap, rap, rap.

What in the world is that noise?

Rap, rap, rap.

“Narena!” Nyxen's voice pierced into Narena's mind. She grumbled, turned over again and thrust her pillow over her head. “Narena!” Nyxen's voice again.

“What?” Narena finally replied, but remained in her bed.

“You have some guests at the door.”

“Tell them I'm busy,” Narena replied, annoyed.

“For the love of the Yew, Narena, just come to the door.”

“Oh, all right.” Narena reluctantly got up and made her way towards the door to her bedroom. On the way, she caught a glimpse of her short, disheveled dark brown hair, which was standing upright in all directions of her head, awkwardly framing her cute, button nose. Her deep orange eyes peered back at her, and she sighed as she sauntered to the front entryway to her home, which was located between the protruding roots of an old oak tree. “Okay, what do you want?” She was not in a mood to even attempt to hide any form of disdain for her brother, or whoever it was at the door who

dared interrupt her rest. Especially after what she had been through recently.

But rather than the door to door fox-bristle broom salesman she was expecting, standing at the front door was a lumpy salamander, its skin glistening with mucous, black as night with a rusty chestnut brown stripe swooping from head to tail. “Hi Narena,” he said. “It’s certainly been a while, hasn’t it?”

“Hawthorne! What are you doing here? How did you know where I lived?” Narena replied, rushing to her old friend for a much overdue embrace.

“I knocked on a few doors and this guy said he would show me the way.”

“What guy?”

“Um, hello Narena,” a deep voice stammered from behind Hawthorne.

Narena peeked around her salamander friend to find Kellen, and her eyes widened. His sun-kissed skin glimmered in the light that shone through the doorway, reflecting even the smallest beam of sunlight on the napes of his muscular frame. Narena couldn’t help but catch a glance at his deep green eyes, and without realizing it, blushed.

Kellen was quite a few years older than Narena, though maintained an air about himself that made him seem much younger. But though his handsome face was youthful, he possessed a sense of authority along with his take-control attitude. Each muscle, though tattooed with battle scars, was effortlessly perfect and delicately placed to ripple and gleam with each

movement. Kellen had always been admired by female and male nymphs alike, as his handsomeness often coincided with his rebellious attitude in social situations. But this was a meeting under a different circumstance, certainly no party or gathering at the Holly Bush Pub.

“What are you doing here?” Narena asked, “I’m so glad you’re all right!” She added before she could stop herself. She felt her face flush again despite her best efforts. Kellen looked a bit confused, but kept a slight smile on the corners of his mouth.

“All right? Why wouldn’t he be all right?” Nyxen interrupted. “What’s going on? Does this have anything to do with what you saw yesterday, Narena?”

“Shush, Nyxen!”

“What is he talking about?” Kellen demanded.

“Nothing, nothing. I wasn’t there, I didn’t see anything.” Kellen’s eyes narrowed.

“You weren’t *where*? *What* didn’t you see? Come on-- spill it!”

“I don’t have to tell you anything,” she muttered through clenched teeth.

“She won’t even tell me!” Nyxen interjected, “but she’s been hiding in her room ever since.”

“I needed a decent rest. I’ve had a rough last few days.”

“Not until yesterday...” Nyxen trailed off. “Before that you seemed fine.”

“Define ‘fine’ for Narena,” Kellen chuckled. “Is ‘fine’ participating in her usual oddball antics or not? Refresh my memory.”

“I ought to refresh your face with a knuckle sandwich,” Narena grunted.

“Did something scare you yesterday, Narena?” Hawthorne asked. “Because to me you seem a little off as well. Did you see something horrible and frightening and you can't get rid of the image out of your mind?”

Narena stopped. She took her friend's squishy hand. “Did that happen to you, Hawthorne? What did you see?”

Hawthorne shook his head. “I can't say it... out loud. I... I... just can't say it. It was too... horrible. So horrible!”

“Horrible, like... a bright white skeleton where there used to be somebody?” Narena whispered.

“How did you know?” Hawthorne whispered back.

“Hey, how much did you see?” Kellen demanded again.

“I only saw the skeletons,” Hawthorne said. “Dozens and dozens of skeletons.”

“What about you?” Kellen said, taking Narena's arm. “What, exactly, did *you* see?”

“Yes!” Nyxen said, almost shouting. “Tell us already, for love of the Yew!”

Narena's eyes teared up. “I saw it all,” she said softly. “I saw the little mousey creature. I saw the swarm-- some kind of insects I've never seen before. They can't, they couldn't be a part of our Forest! And I saw them...” A tear dropped from her orange eyes. “They... they...”

“They what?!” Nyxen cried. “What did they do?”

“They ate the creature,” Kellen finished for Narena. “They swarmed him and ate every morsel of him, until nothing was left but his bones.”

Nyxen gasped, and Hawthorne began to cry softly. Narena wiped her face and set her jaw. She was, after all, her father's daughter.

“That's terrible!” Nyxen cried. “Who are these insects? How did they even get into our Forest? What's the king doing about this?”

“The king is taking it under advisement,” Kellen said in the tone of a court spokesman. “The king advises his subjects to take care when out in the Forest.”

“What in the world does that mean?!” Narena demanded.

“Nothing,” Kellen admitted. “It means nothing. It means the king has no idea what to do.”

“So it's up to us, isn't it?”

“No, it's up to us warriors. There's nothing *you* can do. You're just a research scientist. You talk to birds and squirrels. This is out of your league.”

Narena sighed. Kellen was right. She was, after all, just a research scientist, appointed by King Alston himself to give her some legitimacy in the kingdom with a purpose, a job. But the real reason, to keep her out of trouble, Narena was certainly smart enough to be savvy to. But despite this, she had always harbored a bitterness from the constant raining of suggestions of how to exist. She felt as though nothing she did was ever good enough, no matter how intelligent it was, simply because someone else, mostly male nymphs, felt threatened by something she did or thought out better than them. Her mind raced back to a time of being ousted from a

bird-watching club because she befriended the birds enough to bring them to meet the club, only to be greeted by fear and anger that she had let her guard down to a creature so much larger than a nymph. After that incident, she had resolved herself to thinking that she could not alter the way others felt about her, only that she could continue to only project her true self to everyone. And if they still rejected it, then she didn't need them.

“Really?” she snapped back at Kellen. “So why are you here instead of out with your unit, beating the bushes to find and destroy these insects?”

“Yeah, why were you home when I knocked?” Hawthorne demanded. “Why weren't you out on maneuvers? Why weren't you out avenging my species' genocide?!”

“Good question,” Nyxen joined in. “Very good question. Why are you here instead of out there?” He joined his sister and Hawthorne in looming closer to Kellen, backing him up against the wall by the front door.

Kellen looked slightly nervous, then motioned everyone closer, and the four huddled up.

“I don't really know what's going on,” he said quietly. “But I overheard part of the argument between my father and the king. My father wants us to go to war but the king forbade it. He says it's too dangerous. I think he said-- I'm not sure, because my father was yelling, and the king was speaking very low-- I *think* he said he needs to communicate with...” Kellen looked around before continuing. “Labete,” he finished in a whisper.

The three gasped.

For more information on T. Damon, please visit
<https://tdamon.wordpress.com>

And check out her books on

Amazon

https://www.amazon.com/Falling-Forest-Spirit-1/dp/1502525291/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1491157165&sr=8-1&keywords=the+falling+t.+damon

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